THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN ILLINOIS:
A STUDY IN PRACTICAL ABOLITIONISM

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by

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INTRODUCTION

The slavery controversy was as hotly debated in Illinois as it was in other sections of the United States. Though slavery had been prohibited in the state by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, slaveholders did enter the state. Since it was deemed necessary to recognize slave ownership that had existed under the French occupation, the Illinois constitution of 1818 provided for a system of indentured servitude.¹ In the early 1820s, on the heels of the Missouri controversy, pro-slavery elements attempted to have slavery incorporated in the state's basic law. The movement for a convention to write slavery into the constitution was defeated, however, and the state remained at least nominally free.²

In the years following the defeat of the pro-slavery forces, the antislavery population of the state appears to have grown rapidly. Many persons of New England stock emigrated to Illinois during the mid-twenties and early thirties. These were joined by groups whose antislavery convictions made remaining in the South a risky proposition at best.³ Thus, by the time abolitionists began to agitate after 1830, there was a considerable antislavery (though not necessarily abolitionist) population in the state. It was from this antislavery segment of the populace that agents for the underground railroad would have to be recruited.

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The underground railroad was extolled by abolitionists in the ante-bellum years as the "freedom line," the means by which thousands of black slaves were enabled to escape the "house of bondage." Southerners, of course, vilified the road as the work of "nigger stealing abolitionists." Thus, from the very beginning there has been a controversy over the nature and purpose of the underground railroad. Much of this debate has been due to differing understandings of just what the road was. One veteran of the work saw it as a "deep-laid scheme, having in view the restoration of God-given rights to helpless hunted fugitives. . .resulting in gradual emancipation, and finally in total abolition with the consent of the slaveholders themselves." 4

The American historian, Albert Bushnell Hart, asserted that the underground railroad was "not a route, but a network; not an organization but a conspiracy of thousands of people banded together for the deliberate purpose of depriving their Southern neighbors of their property and of defying the fugitive slave laws of the United States." 5

Both of these statements of the nature of the road overstate the case. More recent scholarship has pointed out that there was, in actuality, no "deep-laid scheme," no national conspiracy, to entice slaves from the South. In fact, Professor Larry Gara goes to almost the opposite extreme by dismissing the underground railroad as a largely legendary institution. 6 As with most historical debates, the truth appears to lie somewhere between these two extremes. An early writer on the history of Negro servitude in Illinois may have given the best assessment when he wrote:

It [the underground railroad] was not a systematic organization with regular stations and officers, but rather a number of isolated communities where the escaping negro was sure of rest
and protection. Usually when a slave reached one of these so-called "stations," he was fed, housed for a short time, and assisted in one way or another to reach the next "depot" if one such was known.\(^7\)

This statement of the organization and operation of the underground railroad points out an important facet of the operation which has been largely overlooked by other writers, namely, the element of flexibility. As will be shown in the following pages, there were a number of routes a fugitive might take across the state. Often, in more densely populated areas, the number of stations was large enough to allow some recourse if the home of one agent was watched too closely. As routes were not fixed, neither were modes of transportation. Abolitionists of this period had their share of "Yankee ingenuity." They made use of the means at hand to achieve the end of seeing another fugitive safe in the Queen's dominions.

Professor Gara has criticized early work on the underground railroad especially that of Wilbur H. Siebert, and pointed out the shortcomings of that work. He calls for a re-evaluation of three elements of the story of the underground railroad. These are: "the implication of very large numbers of underground railroad passengers; the role of the underground railroad in the abolition movement, and the part that the fugitives themselves played in the underground railroad saga."\(^8\) In his book, The Liberty Line, Gara has attempted at least a partial corrective of the work of earlier historians. However, his "correction" has come close to iconoclasm. It appears that Gara is bent on repudiating that which he set out to revise. The purpose of this work is to make some headway in answering Gara's criticisms
of the earlier studies and yet not completely deny that the underground railroad played any significant part in the abolition movement. A study of the movement in Illinois provides a good basis for such a synthesis of opposing views.
ENDNOTES


4 Eber M. Pettit, Sketches in the History of the Underground Railroad (Fredonia, N.Y., 1879), xv.

5 Albert Bushnell Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 1831-1841 (New York, 1906), 228.


7 Harris, Negro Servitude in Illinois, 59-60.

8 Larry Gara, "The Underground Railroad--A Re-evaluation," Ohio Historical Quarterly, LXIX (1960), 217-218. This is only one of a number of articles that Professor Gara has published on this topic. All tend to reinforce the view that the underground railroad was a largely mythical institution perpetuated by abolitionists for their own glory.
CHAPTER ONE

STATIONS AND AGENTS IN ILLINOIS

Illinois was peculiarly well-situated to play a part in the work of the underground railroad. Bounded by Kentucky and Missouri on the south and west, and by Lake Michigan on the northeast, the state was ideally placed to aid the fugitive. Access to the state was fairly easy; one had merely to cross the Ohio or Mississippi River. Travel across the state presented no great problems as the terrain was mostly plains and rolling hills. Upon reaching Lake Michigan—usually at Chicago—the fugitive could almost always secure passage across the lake to Canada.

The term "underground railroad" and all the attendant phrases that grew with it give one the notion that there were certain well-defined routes which a slave might take to get across the state. Siebert and other writers certainly support this view. From their studies one learns that there were four routes across the state leading roughly from southwest to northeast. One of these lines began at Cairo, on the Ohio, and proceeded northward along nearly the same path as that now taken by the Illinois Central Railroad. A second route ran from Chester to Sparta northeastward to the Illinois River and then along that stream to Chicago. The third route began at Alton and ran northeastward to Springfield or to the Illinois
River and then to Chicago. The fourth route ran from Quincy through Galesburg and Princeton and on to Chicago. Yet these routes were not the only ways for fleeing slaves to get across the state. At times the fugitive would become lost and wander from his course. At other times certain known abolitionists would be so closely watched as to make aiding the fugitive extremely hazardous, if not impossible.¹ Such conditions as these made it necessary to alter routes with some degree of frequency. As will be seen, this could most easily be done in the more populated areas where a number of abolitionist sympathizers lived in rather close proximity to one another.

Stations on the underground railroad were located throughout the state, though they were more numerous in central and northern sections. It appears that, where possible, stations were within a night's (or day's) travel of one another. This was less true in the southern portion of the state where a majority of the populace was proslavery in sentiment.² Yet, even here, stations were often established in fairly close proximity to each other. This is aptly illustrated by a portion of the route from Sparta. From Sparta the fugitive went to Eden (2 miles east); then 10 miles north of Eden was Henry East's station, eight miles northeast of that was John McLarkin's station, and 14 miles northeast of that was a station kept by John Henry. In addition to these stations there were other agents in the neighborhood who were sympathetic to the work.³ The stations in this section of the state were generally located in communities of Scotch Covenanters. James Wilson, one of Siebert's correspondents, thought that Sparta was "the place most prominent, and what may be called
headquarters in all efforts [sic] in behalf of the fugitive." The same correspondent noted that after the Illinois Central Railroad was completed, it was used to do the work of the underground railroad. Other stations were located at Oakdale, Nashville, and Centralia, and from there along the ICRR to Chicago. Another group of stations to which fugitives could go from Sparta was located at Reno in Bond County. There were several men there who were willing to offer assistance to the slaves. The best known of these and the apparent "leader" in the area around Reno was James Rosebrough. He was known in the area as an abolitionist, and once was almost hanged on account of his principles. On another occasion, he was threatened with having his house burned down. According to one of Siebert's correspondents who knew Rosebrough, "This uprisin was not so much because we had helped off slaves, as because we were outspoken on the subject of slavery." From Reno the fugitives were taken or sent to Waverly or Springfield. Stations in this area were rather rare, so the routes taken are pretty much a matter of conjecture.

The line from the vicinity of Alton is somewhat easier to trace. There were a number of antislavery sympathizers around Alton as well as a number of free blacks who could generally be counted on to give aid to the fugitive. This was especially true after the Lovejoy murder in 1837.

Though members of the mob that killed Lovejoy were not prosecuted and the attitudes of Altonians toward abolitionists were generally unchanged, there was a marked reaction to the killing. Protest meetings were held in a number of places and there was a considerable
outcry from the press--North and South. More important than this though was the effect of Lovejoy's martyrdom on those not quite committed to abolition. The suppression of Lovejoy and the "gag rule" in Congress combined to make many whites fear that their own civil liberties were in danger. As a result of this fear there were large accessions to antislavery societies and the ranks of those willing to aid the fugitive were swelled considerably. 8

From Alton the fugitive was directed to Brighton and thence to Jerseyville, where more help could be found. In both of these towns there were several places where the fugitives might find aid. 9 Those who crossed the river below Alton from St. Louis, could expect to find aid at a Baptist Church located near the present town of Collinsville. 10 Thence they were sent on to the vicinity of Alton. Fugitives crossing the Mississippi north of Alton--generally near Grafton--found aid first at several places along Otter Creek, or in Otterville, and then went on to Jerseyville. 11 An alternative route was to follow the Illinois River northeastward from its confluence with the Mississippi just above Alton. If this latter route were taken, it appears that the fugitive would be steered northeastward to stations around Waverly and then to Jacksonville.

Jacksonville was also a haven for fugitives. Here, too, were a number of stations where the slave might find aid. Though first settled by men of distinct southern background, in the 1820s and 1830s there was a considerable influx of settlers of New England origins into the community. Led by the famous "Yale Band"--a group of young ministers--New Englanders began to migrate to Jacksonville
and its vicinity bringing also their antislavery views. Illinois College was established during this period and provided a seed-bed for the spreading of abolitionism. Though considerably less radical than students at either Knox College at Galesburg or the Mission Institute at Quincy, those associated with Illinois College suffered the onus of being known as abolitionists. According to one settler of the period, "To be an Abolitionist meant political ostracism and in many localities those so branded were social outcasts." In spite of this, many of those associated with the college were willing to aid the slave in his flight. Deacon Elihu Wolcott enjoyed the distinction of being known as the "conductor-in-chief" in the Jacksonville area. Though most of the agents in and around Jacksonville were Congregationalists, some members of other churches were also represented.

From Jacksonville it was an easy trip over to Springfield and thence northeasterward roughly along the route of the Springfield-Chicago Stage Line. Once north of Springfield the number of stations proliferated and help was apparently rather easily obtained. In addition to the route through Springfield, the slave could be directed northward from Jacksonville toward the Illinois River. As he proceeded northeasterward the slave could expect to find aid at Delavan, Circleville, Dillon, Washington, Lawn Ridge, Granville, and either Princeton or LaSalle. Here the route connected with the one from Quincy and Galesburg and continued to Chicago.

The final line ran across the northern part of the state from the Mississippi to Lake Michigan. The chief western terminus for this string of stations was Quincy. Quincy was regarded by at least one
contemporary of the underground railroad activity as "Station Number 1." It is not surprising that Quincy was "honored" with this notoriety. Quincy is situated on the Mississippi River at the extreme western "bulge" of Illinois. In the mid-nineteenth century the "Gem City" was a bustling commercial center through which passed much of the produce of the region on the other side of the river.

The rise of antislavery sentiment in Quincy is generally attributed to Dr. David Nelson, a Presbyterian minister. Dr. Nelson, born in Tennessee and originally a slaveholder, moved to Marion County, Missouri in 1830 and founded Marion College, a manual labor institution for the training of missionaries. In 1836 Dr. Nelson was forced to leave Missouri by a mob who disapproved of his antislavery views. Settling in Quincy, Dr. Nelson determined to make another attempt at forming a school. To this end he acquired land to the east of Quincy and began his Mission Institute. This was also a manual labor school and soon reflected Dr. Nelson's antislavery views. Unlike most promoters of underground railroad operations, Dr. Nelson apparently favored direct action in enticing slaves from Missouri. Accordingly, a system was established whereby students would cross to the Missouri side in a skiff and signal by rapping two stones together. If the signal was answered, a student engaged in the work noted, "we were to help such as needed help, to a station 16 mi. east of Quincy. At that station there was a barn, painted red, so that no mistake need be made." Apparently, no one ever answered the signals of this particular student. He says later in the same letter, "I never persuaded, or even suggested to a slave to leave his master, but if he
came to me panting for freedom, I helped him to the peril [sic] of my life." But, if this individual never had the opportunity to go into Missouri to entice a slave to escape, there was at least one well-known instance in which young men associated with Mission Institute paid dearly for their part in that operation.

On July 12, 1841 three residents of the Mission Institute were fishing on the Mississippi. According to Alanson Work, one of the three, "A brother from the Institute having been in Missouri, saw some slaves who longed for freedom, and agreed to help them across the Mississippi River." It was on this day, July 12, that the three men were to meet the slaves and carry them to Illinois. However, the blacks, for some reason, perhaps out of fear that the students were really slave catchers posing as abolitionists, betrayed the three, and they were promptly imprisoned. The trial and conviction of these three, Alanson Work, James E. Burr, and George Thompson by a Missouri Court greatly aroused the antislavery element in Quincy. A group of antislavery sympathizers who styled themselves the Anti-Slavery Concert of prayer passed two resolutions concerning the arrest and trial of the trio: First, that the charge was untrue, the verdict unjust, and that they were virtually "committed, tried, condemned and punished, not as State felons, but as Abolitionists." The second resolution provided for a committee consisting of the Rev. William Beardsley, Mr. J. L. Seymour, Judge Henry H. Snow, and Willard Keyes, to confer with the legal counsel employed by the prisoners at their trial, and with such other gentlemen as they may deem proper, in order to obtain all the important facts in the case, and they report at a subsequent meeting, for the purpose of publishing it, as soon as possible, that the prisoners, their friends, and the institution to which two of them
belonged, may be relieved from the imputation and disgrace to which they may be liable.22

The pamphlet which presented the published findings of this committee was released in 1842.

Though this was undoubtedly a partisan group, as is indicated by the first resolution, the three young men were not completely exonerated. After asserting the good character of each of the three, it is noted that they did not notify their teachers of their intentions and "in this deviated from that correctness of conduct for which they had ever been distinguished." It was their eagerness to aid the oppressed which caused them to take such drastic action and "go beyond the bounds of prudence." And for this they were mildly re-proached by the committee:

And though viewing this event as occurring in the Providence of God, we would by no means censure or condemn those brethren, fully persuaded that their intention was purely benevolent, we would yet express our opinion that they erred in judgment in the case, just as all men are liable to err, and that the course they pursued is not the way to effect on a large scale the emancipation of the enslaved.23

This reluctance to enter slave territory to entice a bondsman to run away is a recurring theme in the history of underground railroad operations in Illinois. While many might (and did) favor aiding a fugitive who came to their door, there were practically none who would admit the justification, or wisdom, of going into slave territory and enticing slaves to run away.24

There were a number of other Quincyans, besides those at the Mission Institute, who were willing to aid the fugitive once he reached the Illinois side of the river. The presence of a number of anti-slavery sympathizers in the vicinity of Quincy enabled fugitives to
be sent to various places in the neighborhood and thus helped avoid detection.

The next station from Quincy was located at Mendon some 15 miles to the northeast. At this place also, there were a number of stations. Most of these were located on farms near the town. According to H. D. Platt, a son of one of the conductors at Mendon, there were at least seven different places where the fugitives could hope to find assistance. From Mendon the fugitives went to Augusta or Round Prairie, thence to Plymouth, and then on to Galesburg. At each of these villages there were a few men of antislavery views who were willing to aid the fugitive when one came to their door. But, of course, each of these stations was not always used on a trip. At times the journey from the river to Plymouth (a matter of some 45 miles) might be made in one trip. Where stops were made, and for how long, depended on the exigencies of the individual situation.

Deacon Jireh Platt, the father of two of Siebert's correspondents, kept one of the rare records of underground railroad activity. These records were copied by his son from a "sort of diary & farm record" and provide an idea of the amount of traffic on the road through Mendon. It is interesting that the entries are dated from 1848 to 1859. Why there were no earlier entries is open to conjecture. H. D. Platt does note that his father did have another "blue book" which had vastly more in it. Apparently, this record was lost.
Galesburg was the next widely known station. Again, there were several stations in the vicinity of the town. Galesburg was undoubtedly one of the leading abolitionist centers of the state. It was known variously as that "little nigger stealing town," and that "Nest of nigger thieves." It is hardly surprising that the town should have this distinction. The founders of the original settlement came from the "burned-over" country of central and western New York. This group of New Yorkers was joined by settlers of similar views from Vermont and from Cincinnati. The coming of the Cincinnati group, led by William Holyoke, founder and elder of the Sixth Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati and a trustee of Lane Seminary, was to have important consequences for the Galesburg community as it brought the direct influence of the militant abolitionist group of that city to the settlement. All in all, a list of the prominent settlers of Galesburg reads like a 'Who's Who' of evangelical reform.

Like Quincy, Galesburg also had its abolitionist-orientated educational institution. Knox College was founded by George W. Gale and others of the original settlers who believed in the necessity of providing an institution for general education and the training of ministers. Gale was well-acquainted with the setting up and maintenance of this type of school since he had been instrumental in the beginning of Oneida Institute in New York. Knox College provided the nucleus of the abolition sentiment in Galesburg, and most of the agents in the vicinity were connected in some way with the College. The Old First Church along with several homes served as stations in and around Galesburg.
From Galesburg the number of stations proliferated as did the number of possible routes. If the fugitives were directed north out of Galesburg they could go via Ontario and Andover, up to Geneseo, and thence to Lyndon. From Lyndon the path lay more or less due east to Chicago through such localities as Sterling, Dixon, Lee Center, Paw Paw, Sugar Grove, Aurora, and Hinsdale. A more direct route led from Galesburg through Knoxville, "Nigger Pt.," Toulon, Osceola, and Providence to Princeton. At each of these places, or near them, lived one or more persons of antislavery views who were willing to aid any fugitive who might come their way.

From Princeton, where several lines converged, the route led eastward to LaSalle, thence to Ottawa, and on to Chicago by one of several routes. One of these went through Northville, Plainfield, Cass, and Lyons to Chicago. Another possibility was to use the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad to transport fugitives from Peru to Chicago. There is evidence that this mode of transportation was used on at least one occasion. A third alternative for the fugitive was to proceed northeastward out of Princeton along the Old State Road. He could expect to find aid at Paw Paw, Sugar Grove, Aurora, and Hinsdale before arriving at Chicago. As noted previously, these are merely possibilities of routes open to fugitives based on the localities where known abolitionist sympathizers resided.

Once the fugitive arrived in Chicago, he was usually safe. Here men like Dr. Charles V. Dyer, Philo Carpenter, and Zebina Eastman offered shelter to the fugitive and aided him on his way across the lake. The usual method was to secure passage on a lake steamer.
whose captain was sympathetic to the plight of the fugitive. Though there were apparently several steamers willing to carry fugitives, one of the most notorious was the Illinois under the command of a Captain Blake. One of the crew of another lake steamer wrote that he had "helped a good many" to liberty when he worked on the boat.38

The preceding pages give some idea of the extent and diversity of the routes across Illinois. However, it is not suggested that these were the only ways by which fugitives crossed the state nor that every fugitive that entered the state was aided by the underground railroad. Also, contrary to many accounts, some fugitives were captured and returned to bondage from Illinois. This was especially true in the southern part of the state, but there were instances of fugitives being captured even in Chicago.39 During the three decades immediately preceding the Civil War and especially in the years after 1850, it became increasingly profitable to turn a fugitive over to the authorities. Rewards were often of a sum large enough to offer a rather great inducement. If pecuniary gain were not enough to cause a man to deliver up the fugitive, statute law often made it dangerous for him not to do so.
ENDNOTES


4James Wilson to Siebert, Centralia, Illinois, January, 1896, Siebert Papers. N. D. Harris in his *Negro Servitude in Illinois*, 60, asserted that he was unable to find evidence of any railroads in the state being used for the work of the underground railroad. It appears likely though that Harris is in error. Another of Siebert's correspondents, George L. Burroughs, states that he went to Chicago in 1857 from his home in Hamilton, Ont. to take a job as a porter on the Illinois Central from Cairo to Chicago for the express purpose of aiding fugitives. Also in 1857, the Illinois Central was sued for allegedly aiding a fugitive to escape — *Rodney v. Illinois Central Railroad Co.*, 19 Ill. 42.

5Rev. Robert Ramsey to Siebert, Cadiz, Ohio, August 16, 1892, Siebert Papers.

6N. A. Hunt to Siebert, Riverside Calif., February 12, 1896, Siebert Papers.

7W. H. Siebert interview with Mrs. Lucinda Seymour, Windsor, Ont., July, 1895, Siebert Papers. Mrs. Seymour was a fugitive who had been aided by blacks in Alton and other abolitionists throughout Illinois.

8Harris, *Negro Servitude in Illinois*, 95-98. Merton L. Dillon, *Elijah P. Lovejoy, Abolitionist Editor* (Urbana, Illinois,

Martha Bentley, There the Heart Is (Greenfield, Illinois, 1965), 108 and 130-131; Benjamin G. Merkel, "Antislavery Sentiment in Missouri," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Washington University, St. Louis, Mo., 1939), 233-234, gives information on the Brighton stations. The author visited one of these that is still standing. Oscar B. Hamilton, ed., History of Jersey County, Illinois (Chicago, 1919), 257-259. The information in this work was corroborated by an interview with an old resident of Jerseyville who was raised in one of the homes that served as a station and who personally knew the son of one of the agents.

"Bethel Baptist Church" program of the Madison County Historical Society, April 16, 1961. This church was founded by the Rev. James Lemen, a Virginian of avowed antislavery principles. Rev. Lemen also founded a Baptist Church at Troy in 1833, and was elected president of the board of trustees of the school that was to become Shurtleff College in 1827. W. T. Norton, ed., Centennial History of Madison County, Illinois and Its People, 1812-1912 (Chicago, 1912), 119, 344.

S. V. White to Siebert, March 7, 1896, New York, N.Y. Siebert also got information on the stations around Jerseyville from a series of interviews conducted for him by Daniel J. Murphy during February, 1896. Murphy talked with Mrs. Maria Ford, Dennis Brown, and William J. Kingsley all of Jerseyville. Transcripts of the interviews are in the Siebert Papers. In spite of criticism leveled on Siebert for the use of this type of information, the accounts corroborate one another and other material that is available.

Frank J. Heinl, "Congregationalism in Jacksonville and Early Illinois," JISHs, XXVII (1934-35) 443. The "Yale Band" was a group of Yale divinity students who determined to come to the West to spread the word of God. The original members of the "Band" were: Theron Baldwin, John F. Brooks, Mason Grosevenor, Elisha Jenner, William Kirby, Julian M. Sturtevant, and Asa Turner.

Tbid., 450.

Tbid., 450.


17 William A. Richardson, Jr., "Dr. David Nelson and His Times," JISHS, XIII (1920-1921), 443-444.

18 N. A. Hunt to Siebert, Riverside, Calif., February 12, 1896 and John Burn to Siebert, San Jose, Calif., January 25, 1896, Siebert Papers. The red barn mentioned by Mr. Hunt was probably that of Capt. John Burn of Payson. The Burn farm was about 15 miles east of Quincy.

19 N. A. Hunt to Siebert, Riverside, Calif., February 12, 1896, Siebert Papers.

20 Narrative of Facts, Respecting Alanson Work, James A. Burr and Geo. Thompson, Prisoners in the Missouri Penitentiary, for the Alleged Crime of Negro Stealing (Quincy, Illinois, 1842), 6. Eastman, "Sketch of Moses Hunter," 12. Of the three, James Burr and George Thompson were students at the Institute, and Alanson Work was employed as a sort of handyman around the school.

21 Ibid., 6.

22 Ibid., 3.

23 Ibid., 5.

24 Joel A. Ranney, who corresponded with one of Siebert's aides, asserted: "No antislavery man in Woodford County ever enticed a slave away from his master, but when they came this way they were fed and helped on their journey." Joel A. Ranney to John H. Ryan, n.p., n.d., Siebert Papers.


26 Ibid.

27 Ibid. In the excerpts quoted to Siebert, Deacon Platt records the passage of 32 blacks through his station between May 19, 1848 and October, 1859.
28. Ibid. It is quite possible that Deacon Platt destroyed this "blue book" if it existed.


30. Ibid., 66-68. Muelder traces the origins of the Galesburg colony in considerable detail, emphasizing the evangelical and anti-slavery proclivities of the settlers.

31. Ibid., 69. In spite of his position as a trustee of Lane Seminary, Holyoke had wholeheartedly supported the "Rebels." In 1835 he had joined with a number of these dissident students and others to form the Ohio Antislavery Society at Putnam, Ohio, in the face of a hostile mob.

32. Ibid., 25-32.

33. George Churchill to Siebert, Galesburg, Ill., January 29, 1896, Siebert Papers. Locations of stations and names of agents in the vicinity of Galesburg may be found in Charles C. Chapman, History of Knox County, Illinois (Chicago, 1878), Chap. VIII.


35. Mrs. P. M. Blair to Siebert, Toulon, Ill., January 28, 1896, Siebert Papers.


38. Andrews, History of Chicago, I, 606. W. H. Siebert interviewed with Mrs. Lucinda Seymour, Windsor, Ont., July, 1895. Mrs. Seymour told Siebert that she and her husband had spent a week in Chicago in the care of "a Mr. Johnson" who owned a soap factory there. Her husband worked in the factory while they awaited the arrival of the steamer under Captain Blake. John G. Wiebelen to Siebert, Fairview, Pa., November 26, 1895, Siebert Papers. Wiebelen reported that he had worked on a lake steamer from Chicago to Collingwood, Ont. during 1855-56. In this period he says he helped "a good many" to liberty. At least one of the fugitives interviewed by Benjamin Drew in 1855 mentioned that he and his wife had entered Canada in this way.

39 William Wells Brown, *The Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* (Reading, Mass., 1969), 31-32. This is a reprint of the original, 1848 edition. One of several recaptures of fugitives in Chicago was reported in the *Western Citizen* of November 3, 1846. Of course, such accounts were always accompanied by a rather scathing condemnation of the slave-catchers and the laws which made such pursuit possible.
CHAPTER TWO

LEGAL AND SOCIAL PROHIBITIONS TO AIDING

FUGITIVES AND REACTIONS TO THEM

The legal prohibitions against offering aid to the fugitive came from three sources, the Constitution, federal law, and state statute. Each added a bit more protection for the slave owner and provided proportionally less recourse for the slave.

The Constitution of the United States provided the basis for the subsequent legislation in Article IV, section 2, paragraph 3, which states:

No Person held to Service or Labor in one State, under the Laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in Consequence of any Law or Regulation therein, be discharged from such Service or Labor, but shall be delivered upon Claim of the Party to whom such Service or labor may be due.

This particular paragraph was written as a specific concession to the South to protect its "peculiar institution" and, of course, gain its ratification of the Constitution. Yet, positive legislation was needed to enforce this provision. To provide for this necessity, Congress, on February 12, 1793, passed: "An Act respecting fugitives from justice and persons escaping from the service of their master." This act provided that the master or his agent could arrest the alleged fugitive, take him before a judge or magistrate, and upon oral testimony or written affidavit convincing the judge or magistrate
of the truth of the allegation, a certificate was to be issued empowering the owner or agent to remove the slave. The act further provided a fine of $500 for anyone who hindered the arrest of a suspected fugitive, effected his escape, or harbored a suspected fugitive from the master or his agent.¹

Most states enacted legislation in harmony with that of the federal government, and Illinois was no exception. Of course, fugitive slave provisions had existed in the territory that comprised Illinois since the passage of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Though this ordinance prohibited slavery, it also provided "that any person escaping into the same, from whom labor or service is lawfully claimed in any one of the original States, such fugitive may be lawfully re-claimed and conveyed to the person claiming his or her labor or service aforesaid."² This provision was continued in the laws of both the Indiana and Illinois Territories.³ When Illinois achieved statehood in 1818, slavery was prohibited in the state constitution in accordance with the Northwest Ordinance.⁴ However, by that time, Illinoisans had grown used to the practice of indenturing Negroes to extended terms of service. This practice grew out of the interpretation of the Ordinance by early governors that slavery itself was not prohibited thereby, but only the introduction of new slaves. Governor Ninian Edwards—known as one of the most distinguished lawyers in the territory—declared in 1817 that the Ordinance of 1787 allowed for "voluntary" servitude, or the indenturing of Negroes for limited periods of service. He advocated reducing the term to one year, however, and asserted that such contracts were "reasonable within
themselves, beneficial to the slaves, and not repugnant to the public interests.\textsuperscript{5} In order to provide a basis for controlling these black "indentured servants," a slave code was drawn up in 1803, modelled closely on the codes of Virginia and Kentucky. This code was re-enacted in substantially the same form by the Indiana Territorial Assemblies of 1805 and 1807. Thus was laid the legal basis for the system of indentures adopted in the state of Illinois.\textsuperscript{6} The Constitution of 1818, the Statutes at Large of 1818-19, and the Constitution of 1848 all included this "black code" and it remained operative until repealed on February 7, 1865.\textsuperscript{7}

Since the holding of Negro "servants" was thus protected by statute law, some provision had to be made for those who might decide that the status of indentured servant was not as "beneficial" as Governor Edwards thought. The problem of fugitives probably developed rather early in the history of the state. A group of settlers in Bond County was apparently aiding fugitives during the 1820s.\textsuperscript{8} To combat this threat to what was considered legal property, a section dealing with fugitive slaves was included in the state's criminal code.

Section 149 of the criminal code of 1829 provided that:

\begin{quote}
If any person shall harbor or secrete a negro, mulatto, or person of color, the same being a slave or servant, owing service or labor to any other persons, whether they reside in this state or any other state or territory, or district within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States, or shall in any wise hinder or prevent the lawful owner or owners of such slaves or servants from retaking them in a lawful manner, every such person so offending, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and fined not exceeding $500., or imprisoned not exceeding six months.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

It was under this section that a number of underground railroad agents were convicted.
The legal right of holding indentured servants had been established by a series of court decisions in the two decades following statehood. These rulings generally held that the sections of the state constitution setting up the system of indentures, and the various statutes passed to implement and augment these sections, were not at variance with the Northwest Ordinance. Thus, by the time fugitive slave cases began to be brought to trial in increasing numbers, a certain body of legal precedent existed as the basis for subsequent decisions. 10

It was not until the 1840s, however, that there was an apparently concerted drive to halt—or at least hinder—those giving aid to the fugitives. During 1842, 1843, and 1844 the courts were forced to decide a number of cases involving aid to fugitive slaves.

The first of these cases was tried in Bureau County, where Owen Lovejoy was indicted for harboring two Negro women, Agnes (on March 1, 1842) and Nancy (on February 1, 1843). He was charged with "keeping in his house, feeding, clothing and comforting the said Nancy," and "harboring, feeding, clothing one said Agnes, a slave." 11 The trial of Lovejoy was a pointed attempt to break the back of the underground railroad operation in Princeton and Bureau County. Norman H. Purple of Peoria, apparently backed by proslavery elements, had pressed the charges and assisted in the prosecution. The hope was to brand Lovejoy as the principal leader of the underground railroad in the area, and have him driven from the community as a law-breaker. The feeling against Lovejoy was expressed by one anti-abolitionist who approached Benjamin Fridley, the state's attorney, and demanded, "Fridley, we
want you to be sure and convict this preacher and send him to prison."
To this Fridley retorted, "Prison! Lovejoy to prison! Your prosecution
will a damn sight more likely send him to Congress."
This assessment proved to be true, but not until Lovejoy had stood trial.

The trial caused quite a stir in Bureau County. Both sides
had marshalled their forces for the struggle as both realized the
importance the case would have in the continuance of underground rail-
road operations in that vicinity. Lovejoy was represented by James H.
Collins, an abolitionist lawyer from Chicago. Collins was known as a
tireless worker who knew every aspect of the legal arguments to be
made. When he was forced to concede one point, he quickly moved on to
another. When testimony revealed that Nancy's owner had been taking
her from Kentucky to Missouri through Illinois, Collins seized on this
point. Illinois law, he said, granted freedom to any slave brought
into the state by his owner. The way was now cleared for Lovejoy's
acquittal.

The most important aspect of this case for operators of the
underground railroad was in Judge John Caton's charge to the jury. He
first pointed out that slavery is not a natural state and thus it must
be specifically provided for in statute law, common law, or by custom.
Thus, to convict Lovejoy, it had to be shown that such law existed in
the place of residence of Nancy's master. Continuing on this line,
Judge Caton said regarding Illinois:

By the Constitution of this State, slavery can not exist here.
If, therefore, a master voluntarily brings his slave within
the state, he becomes from that moment free, and if he escapes
from his master, while in the State, it is not an escape from
slavery, but is going where a free man has a right to go; and
the harboring of such a person is no offense against our law; but the tie which binds a slave to his master can be severed only by the voluntary act of the latter.\textsuperscript{13}

Therefore, a slave entering the state without the consent of his master would still be legally a slave. This was the first instance in Illinois where the courts declared that residence in a free territory entitled a slave to his freedom. Lovejoy's acquittal assured the continuance of the underground railroad operation in Princeton and provided the legal precedent that would later make the holding of indentured servants impossible in the state.\textsuperscript{14}

Before this precedent was admitted, however, two other important cases were decided in favor of slavery. The first involved Dr. Richard Eells, a prominent Quincy physician and an ardent worker on the underground railroad. Apparently, Eells was apprised of the arrival of a fugitive in Quincy by one Berryman Barnet, a free black.\textsuperscript{15} He at once set out to conduct the slave to the next station. Being closely pursued, Eells had the slave jump from the wagon and conceal himself in a field. Eells then returned home. The slave-catchers soon arrived at Eells' door, and, finding his horse well-lathered, and the fugitive's wet clothes in the buggy, they escorted the doctor before the justice of the peace. Eells was held to bail and the case was later tried in the Circuit Court before Stephen A. Douglas. Here Eells was found guilty and fined $400.\textsuperscript{16}

Dr. Eells then appealed the case to the state Supreme Court. Here Eells' attorney made an eloquent plea for his release. The defense was based on two arguments: 1) That only Congress, not the states, had the power to pass legislation regarding fugitive slaves.
Therefore, Section 149 of the criminal code was void and Eells was not subject to prosecution. 2) That Eells did not necessarily know that he was aiding a fugitive. Since it had been decided previously in Birney v. Ohio that knowledge of the status of the fugitive by the defendant ought to be specifically stated in the indictment, and since this was not done in the Eells case, Eells should be freed.17

Justice James Shields refused to accept either of these arguments. Concerning the first assertion he held that the Illinois law was not in conflict with either the Constitution of the United States or the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. He upheld the right of individual states to enact legislation ancillary to the laws of Congress. With regard to the second argument the judge held that the decision in Birney v. Ohio was in error. The offense, he asserted, was not in knowing that the black was a fugitive, but rather in the desire to defraud the owner of legal property. Of course, the conviction was upheld.18

The case was eventually carried to the U.S. Supreme Court where, in 1852, the judgment was again upheld. Eells died before the case reached the highest court having spent a large sum of money and having ruined his health by the successive litigations.19

The second case was tried at the same term of court and involved Julius A. Willard of Jacksonville, who was accused of harboring one, Julia, slave of a Mrs. Lisle from Louisiana. This case differed from the Eells case in that the slave had been voluntarily brought into the state by her mistress.20
This point was stressed to no avail. Justice Walter B. Scott, who delivered the opinion, was unwilling to go to the same lengths as had Judge Caton in the Lovejoy case. The emphasis here was placed, not on the slave's right to freedom, but on the comity which is due to other states. In a rather lengthy argument the Justice pointed out the evils and hardships which would result should Illinois refuse to allow the passage of slaves across her territory. Justice Scott was thus apparently putting the importance of good interstate relations ahead of that of freedom of the individual. 21

These court cases evoked a loud response from anti-slavery sympathizers in the state. Laws calling for the return of fugitives were attacked as unconstitutional and contrary to the higher divine law.

This attack was often mounted in the form of resolutions passed by anti-slavery societies and church groups. In February, 1843, the Western Citizen reported the action of the First Presbyterian Church of Chicago. This body passed a series of resolutions condemning slavery and slaveholders among which was the following:

3) Resolved, That human legislation can never make that right which is in itself wrong. The laws of the land can never nullify, or even weaken, the authority of the Supreme Law-giver. We must obey God rather than man, whenever human and divine legislation come into conflict.

This resolution was only one of a rather large number that were passed during the same period. 22 These resolutions called on all men to abide by divine rather than statute law, to aid the fugitive and to refuse to aid in the return of a fugitive. The Illinois Anti-Slavery Society at its convention in June, 1843 wholly accepted the "higher law" doctrine and added a new argument to those previously advanced: Since the
framers of the Constitution, "neither expected that slavery would be a permanent institution, nor designed to spread a shield over it as such..." the states were "not bound by that instrument to deliver up fugitives from slavery."23 At almost the same time the Putnam County Anti-Slavery Society endorsed the higher law doctrine and denounced the recent court decisions adverse to operators of the underground railroad as a "striking commentary on our boasted free institutions." In addition it was asserted that those who would aid the slave should do so, not secretly, "but openly in the view of the world so far as not needlessly to jeopardize the hunted fugitive."24

It was this feeling of moral correctness that enabled those who would aid the fugitive to withstand not only legal prosecution, but often social ostracism as well. As has been previously noted, there was a considerable proslavery element in Illinois. This group was not strictly confined to the extreme southern part of the state either.

Speaking of Quincy in 1836, Henry Asbury asserted:

In this year we had our first disturbing agitation upon the Anti-Slavery and so-called Abolition question among us. There were many of our people upon each side of the question as presented. Whilst few would acknowledge that they were objectively for slavery, yet the majority especially those from slaveholding states, considered it an insult to be called an Abolitionist. Living as we did upon the border of the slaveholding State of Missouri, where the cry of Abolitionist as applied to anyone, was like the cry of mad dog applied to any unfortunate canine thus denounced, it was easy to throw our people into excitement upon the subject of slavery.25

This antipathy reached a fever pitch in March, 1843, when a band of Missourians crossed the Mississippi and burned the chapel at Mission Institute.26 Slaveholders had repeatedly threatened to take action against the antislavery community in Quincy and clean out
"that nest of nigger stealing missionaries," who, they alleged, were enticing away their legal property. This tension had been greatly increased by the Work, Burr, and Thompson case already mentioned, and some abolitionists saw a direct connection between the two events.27 The Quincy Whig, in reporting the incident, deplored the actions of both sides, but put the responsibility for halting such actions on the abolitionists saying that the situation would not improve "As long as the practice is continued by the abolitionists of preying upon the property of the people of Missouri."28

Nor was the wrath of the Missourians vented only upon Quincyans. Two of the sons of Deacon Jireh Platt, the chief underground agent at Mendon, mention several occasions when Missourians tracked fugitives to their home. On these occasions there were threats against their persons and property. Once a master whose slaves had been aided was so angry that he spent two weeks watching the Platt farm. When finally convinced that he would be unable to recover his property by further surveillance, he returned to Missouri and offered a $1,000 reward for the deacon, dead or alive.29 S. O. Stillman, a brother of another Mendon agent, recalled that often after fugitives had passed through the area men would "prowl around the neighborhood threatening to burn barns [,] stacks &c [,] & we have [sic] to watch the Barns & Premises of those farmers who were thus threatened. . . ."30 Similar threats were made against abolitionists in all parts of the state yet few seem to have been carried out.31

In several areas anti-abolition societies were set up to counteract the work of the underground railroad. After the arrest of Dr. Eells
in August, 1842, a meeting was held in Quincy at the courthouse con-
demning the abolitionists for enticing slaves from Missouri. The
preamble to the resolutions passed at this gathering asserted that those
present were convinced that the abolitionists had a
line established for the purpose of running off the negroes
after their arrival in this state, conveying them by this line
to some point on Lake Michigan, probably Chicago, and there
shipping them to Canada.\textsuperscript{32}

The resolutions deplored the actions of the friends of the fugitives
and determined to aid in the suppression of this activity.

A similar situation occurred in Jacksonville in connection
with the Willard case. At a meeting held at the courthouse on February
23, 1843, the assembled citizens passed a series of resolutions dis-
agreeing with the actions of the abolitionists. This was not, they
declared, a matter of abolition or anti-abolition, "but a flagrant
and high-handed infraction of one of the penal laws of our land."
And, though many saw slavery as an evil, it was agreed that Negro-
stealing was not the best means to combat it. It was further resolved
that the citizens of Jacksonville would "extend the hand of friendship
and hospitality" to Southerners, and be ready "at all times and on all
occasions, promptly and efficiently to aid and protect them in the
enjoyment of their property." Since, therefore, it was believed

that there are regular bands of abolitionists, organized with
depots and relays of horses to run negroes through our state
to Canada, and that one of them is in this town, we will form
an Anti-Negro Stealing Society, as we heretofore formed an
Anti-Horse Stealing Society, and that we will, in this neigh-
borhood, break up the one as we broke up the other.\textsuperscript{33}

These sentiments were echoed in May, 1843, in an editorial in the
\textit{Jacksonville Illinoisan} concerning the Eells case. Noting that the
doctor was notorious "for having attempted last summer to steal and run off a negro," the editor asserted with an apparent feeling of justice being done that Eells had been "recently tried for his rascality and found guilty."\(^34\)

Opposition to the underground railroad even reached to the state constitutional convention in 1847. During the debates on the desirability of allowing free persons of color to enter the state, James W. Singleton of Brown County introduced several resolutions calling for a prohibition of the immigration of blacks--both slave and free. There were many reasons given for this desire, most of which catalogued the woes that an influx of blacks would inflict upon the state. The last, though not the least, of the evils that would occur was that the blacks who settled in Illinois would "have full protection and aid in the completion of a subterranean underground railway, constructed to despoil our neighbors of their property."\(^35\)

With this sort of attitude in western and central Illinois, it is no wonder that, in Missouri, various anti-abolition societies and vigilance committees were set up to halt the flow of fugitives to Illinois. In October, 1842, vigilance committees were formed in Lewis and Ralls Counties to pursue fugitive slaves and examine all strangers. If such strangers could give no satisfactory reason for their presence, they were to be expelled from the state.\(^36\) On November 3, 1843, a meeting of citizens from Lewis and Clark Counties met at Tully and recommended that an Illinois abolitionist be brought to Missouri for punishment every time a Negro was lost. In addition, a reward of $200 was offered for the delivery of Dr. Eells to the newly created
vigilance committee. 37

The traffic continued in spite of these efforts at stemming it. In 1847 a Missourian who had followed one of his slaves across Illinois reported to the St. Louis New Era on the operation of the underground railroad. He concluded that unless slaves could be caught near the border, they were lost. Through the fifties Missouri papers carried accounts of slaves who had been aided to escape. In 1854, for example, the Daily Missouri Republican of St. Louis bemoaned the fact that Negro stealing was becoming comparatively easy. It was noted that, though white men were the chief conductors, blacks were forming organizations to aid their fleeing brothers. To combat the loss of blacks, several societies were formed in and around St. Louis. Yet, if one can judge by the continuance of the outcries of Missourians, these anti-abolition societies and vigilance groups must have been largely unsuccessful. 38

It is readily apparent that there was considerable opposition to the loss of slave property. It seems logical then to assume that there was indeed some loss of property occurring. There is, unfortunately, no way in which this loss can be measured. The number and vehemence of the attacks--both verbal and physical--of proslavery sympathizers upon the operators of the underground railroad suggest that enough slaves were making good their escape to be a constant source of irritation to slaveholders. 39

As a remedy to this, Congress, in 1850, passed a more stringent fugitive slave law. Part of the compromise of that year which attempted to settle a number of sectional issues, the new law sought to make recovery of the fugitive much easier. To this end, it was enacted
that a master need only secure a warrant for his slave, or seize him himself, and testify that the black was indeed his property. The testimony of the black was inadmissible as evidence and anyone asked was required to aid in the apprehension of the Negro. Anyone who aided a fugitive or obstructed his capture was subject to a fine of up to $1,000 and imprisonment for no longer than six months. For the first time, aiding fugitives was made clearly a federal crime.

The passage of this law caused a considerable outcry from the citizens of the state. The pages of the Western Citizen blazed with denunciation of the new law. This new measure, it was argued, had neither moral nor constitutional justification and ought, therefore, to be resisted. This line of attack was to be expected of the Western Citizen, an abolitionist newspaper, but it was not the only organ to decry the ignominy of the law. The Ottawa Free Trader voiced its opinion thus:

In our candid judgment there has not been, during the present century a law passed or an edict issued by any government claiming to be free, which outrages justice as this does. . . . The law will be a dead letter. It cannot be enforced.

One week after the above appeared, the Chicago Common Council met and was apparently bent on making the above-cited assertion fact. In a series of resolutions the Council rebuked free state Senators and Representatives who had a part in the passage of the Compromise. They were fit, the Council declared, "only to be ranked with the traitors, Benedict Arnold, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed his Lord and master for thirty pieces of silver." Going further, the Council called on police and citizens to refrain from aiding in the enforcement of the law.
The American Missionary Association, whose agents were scattered throughout the state, condemned the bill at its annual convention. The passage of this bill, said the members, was going to test "the Christianity of the nation" since it was at variance with "the principles of the Association, the Constitution of the country, and the laws of God." In light of these facts, members of the AMA convened with each other and with the slaves that they would not obey it, "nor any law that evidently contravenes the higher law of our Maker, whatever persecution or penalty we may suffer."44

A meeting at Somonauk, Illinois, on November 30, 1850, summed up all the various arguments against the law. The act was first of all "a base violation of the Constitution of the United States—a flagrant infringement upon the sovereignty of the states." Secondly, it was an "utter violation of those safeguards of personal liberty, the writ of habeas corpus and the right of trial by jury." Finally, it jeopardized the "freedom of all persons without regard for color, circumstances, or condition...as they may be hurried off in a summary manner on the proper 'affidavit' of the veriest knave in Christendom."45

In response to the law, those meeting at Somonauk proposed, not only not to enforce it, but not to vote for those politicians who did. In addition, any public official called upon to execute the provisions of the act was duty bound to resign rather than enforce the law. Again the "higher law" doctrine was invoked. The members of the Somonauk Church would follow the Biblical admonitions to "feed the hungry, clothe the naked, succor the needy, and relieve the distressed," in spite of the laws to the contrary, "though at the peril of fine and imprisonment."46
Such were the sentiments of the opponents of the Fugitive Slave Law. How far these sentiments were carried into action by Illinoisans can only be conjectured as there is no direct evidence that business on the underground railroad increased in the 1850s. There is, however, sufficient evidence of the operation of the road after 1850 to suggest that the law came nowhere near halting the traffic. In fact, if we can believe reports from the Canadian side of the border, the traffic increased sharply in the months immediately following the bill's passage. According to the Fifth Annual Report (1850) of the American Missionary Association, Hiram Wilson, a missionary to blacks in Canada, estimated that in the first three months after the passage of the bill, "not less than three thousand fugitives took refuge there." By the time of the Sixth Annual Report (1851) the emigration was continuing "although in diminished numbers." The extent of this influx of blacks into Canada can only be surmised, though a number of agents of the AMA wrote that "soon after the bill was passed fugitives were fleeing to Canada in vast numbers," and that "there has lately been a large influx of newcomers who are here as the effect of the atrocious 'Fugitive Slave Law.'" Though it would be dangerous to assume that all, or even most of this influx, arrived from the slave states via the underground railroad, it can be said with a degree of certainty that at least a portion of the new arrivals were recent inhabitants of the land south of the Mason and Dixon line.

Opposition to those who would aid the slaves, whether legal or otherwise, apparently merely strengthened their resolve. The devotion to the principle of the higher law permeated the resolutions of the
various antislavery societies and ad hoc groups that flourished during these years. And, while the number aided cannot be ascertained with any degree of certainty, a shift in public opinion can be discerned. As early as 1843 the Illinois Anti-Slavery Society claimed that the plight of the fugitive had aroused many and that "the relation of their wrongs and the sympathy which has been drawn out, has done immense good." As evidence it was asserted that slaveholders readily gave up hope of recapturing their fugitives, thus acknowledging that they had lost "the cooperation and sympathy of the great mass of the people of the north." As time wore on, the hope of recapture in the northern part of the state grew slimmer and slimmer.
ENDNOTES

1 United States Statutes at Large, I, 302-305.


3 In addition to providing for reclamation of the fugitive, the territorial law of 1805 provided a fine of $1,000 for anyone who would aid a slave to escape. This provision was re-enacted in 1807 and subsequently. Francis S. Philbrick, ed., The Laws of Indiana Territory, 1801-1809, Illinois State Historical Society, Collections, XXI (Springfield, Illinois, 1930), 139, 525-526.

4 Though Section 1 of Article VI prohibited slavery, Section 2 allowed slaves from another state to be hired to labor in the salt works near Shawneetown. Such laborers were to be hired for no more than one year at a time. Section 3 gave sanction to the system of indentures, though it provided for the freedom of the children of indentured servants at age twenty-one for males and at age eighteen for females. Emil J. Verlie, ed., Illinois Constitutions, Illinois State Historical Society, Collections, XIII (Springfield, Illinois, 1919) 38-39.

5 Harris, Negro Servitude in Illinois, 6-7.

6 Section 2 of the Law of 1807 is indicative of the status that the blacks were to have and what they were to receive in return for their service: "The said servants shall be provided by the master with wholesome and sufficient food, cloathing and lodging, and at the end of their service, if they shall not have contracted for any reward, food, cloathing, and lodging, shall receive from him, one new and complete suit of cloathing, suited to the season of the year, to wit: a coat, waistcoat, pair of breeches, and shoes, two pair of stockings, two shirts, a hat and blanket." Blacks were to receive whippings as punishment for crimes for which a white man would be fined. The rate was to be twenty lashes for every eight dollars of fine. The total which could be assessed at any one time, however, was forty lashes. Philbrick, Laws of Indiana Territory, 463-467.

7 Harris, Negro Servitude in Illinois, 10.


In this regard see especially Phoebe v. Jay, Breese (1 Ill.), 268-276. This case set forth very explicitly the right to indenture Negroes in apparent contravention of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. Justice Lockwood, in stating the opinion of the court, asserted that while indentures could not have been legalized merely by statute law, this could be done—and had, in fact, been done—by incorporating these provisions in the state constitutions. This opinion was upheld and expanded in Sarah v. Borders, 4 Scammon (5 Ill.), 341-352.

The legal aspects of this case are treated in Harris, Negro Servitude in Illinois, 110. A contemporary account that appears to be quite complete, though told with an antislavery bias, can be found in the Western Citizen, July 13, August 3, and October 19 and 26, 1843.


Western Citizen, October 26, 1843. Harris, Negro Servitude in Illinois, 111-112.

The issue was finally decided in the state supreme court in the case of Jarrot v. Jarrot in 1845. 2 Gilman (7 Ill.), 12-33.


Ibid., 502-503.

Ibid., 510-513.


Julius A. Willard to Eastman, in the Western Citizen, August 24, 1843, and an article in the same paper on February 22, 1844 gave the full details of the case.
21 Willard v. The People, 4 Scammon (5 Ill.), 470-478.

22 Western Citizen, August 24, 1843. Similar resolutions were passed by meetings in Adams County (reported in the issues of July 26, Nov. 18, and Dec. 9, 1842); Bureau County (reported March 9 and April 20, 1843); Farmington (reported March 23, 1843); and the Northern Illinois and Wisconsin Christian Conference (reported October 26, 1843).

23 Ibid., June 15, 1843.

24 Minutes of the Putnam County Anti-slavery Society, July 4, 1843, Siebert Papers.

25 Asbury, Reminiscences of Quincy, 64-65.


28 Quincy Whig, March 15, 1843.


30 S. O. Stillman to Siebert, Galena, Ill., March 6, 1896, Siebert Papers.


32 Quincy Whig, September 3, 1842.

34 Cited in Frank J. Heinl, "Jacksonville and Morgan County," JISHS, XVIII (1925-26), 19.

35 Journal of the Convention, Assembled at Springfield, June 7, 1847, ... for the Purpose of Altering, Amending or Revising the Constitution of the State of Illinois, (Springfield, Illinois, 1847), 95-96.


37 Quincy Whig, December 27, 1843.


39 Ibid., 273. Merkel notes that within the two year period 1856-1858, forty-three Missouri counties lost a total of 4,443 slaves. The remaining counties showed an increase of 2,723. This is a loss of 1,720 slaves in two years. Of this total some were undoubtedly sold South, and some emancipated. However, others undoubtedly ran away and swelled the ranks of the fugitives.

40 United States Statutes At Large, IX, 462-465.

41 Western Citizen, October 8 & 29; November 5 & 19, 1850.

42 Clipped in the Chicago Democrat, October 14, 1850.


44 The American Missionary Association, Annual Report (New York, 1850), 11. The AMA had been formed in 1846 because the then existing missionary societies refused to take a strong stand against slavery. Consequently, in the years after its inception, the AMA continually agitated against slavery and sought to put abolitionist ministers into the field.

45 Western Citizen, December 3, 1850.

46 Ibid., December 3, 1850.
47. H. D. Platt to Siebert, Franklin Neb., March 20, 1896, Siebert Papers. Rev. Platt cites several references from his father's "diary and farm record" which indicate traffic over the road in 1854, 1857 and 1859. Several of Siebert's other correspondents mention aiding fugitives during the fifties. Samuel G. Wright corroborates this with several entries in his Journal noting the passage of fugitives in 1850, 1854 and 1857. It is quite likely that there were others aided in addition to those mentioned. Samuel G. Wright, Journal, typescript in Knox College Library, Galesburg, Illinois.


49. Henry Bibb to AMA, Sandwich, Ont., December 14, 1850, Canadian letter file, American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Dillard University, New Orleans, Louisiana. All references to letters from the AMA Archives are from this collection.

50. Hiram Wilson to Bro. (George) Whipple, St. Catherine's, Ont., November 22, 1850, Canadian letter file, AMA Archives. Though the exact number of emigrants is never noted, there seems to be general agreement among the Canada missionaries that the number was quite large.

51. *Western Citizen*, June 15, 1843.
CHAPTER THREE

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD PERSONNEL:

BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION

Unfortunately, biographical information on many of the agents of the underground railroad is both scattered and scanty. Though many of these men were leaders in their communities, few records remain of their lives, except in the case of some of the most prominent. Yet, a certain amount of data can be found about a number of these agents.

JOHN K. VAN DORN of Quincy was born in Templeton, Massachusetts in 1814. He came West in the late 1830s and settled in Quincy. He was a member of the Congregational Church and took an active part in the congregation. In 1852 he began a lumber business which he apparently continued until his death in 1875. He was "the most noted abolitionist" in the vicinity, and was always ready to aid a fugitive. During the Civil War Van Dorn served as a U.S. Commissioner to distribute provisions to destitute refugees pouring into the state from Missouri.¹

FREDERICK COLLINS of Quincy and Columbus, Illinois, was born in Connecticut on February 24, 1804. At the age of seventeen he was "converted" and entered the Presbyterian Church. The next year (1822) he moved to Collinsville, Illinois where he married Mary L. Allen in 1829. In 1851 they moved to Quincy. Collins was known as a "fearless abolitionist." He was the Free-Soil candidate for Lieutenant
Governor in 1852, and he supported the work and antislavery stance of the American Missionary Association.  

The case of DR. RICHARD EELLS has already been mentioned. The doctor was born in Connecticut and came to Quincy in the early 1830s. He was very active in the work of the underground railroad around Quincy and his activity in this endeavor cost him his fortune and his health. He was active in the Illinois Anti-Slavery Society. At the Sixth Anniversary Meeting held in Chicago in June, 1843, Eells was elected president of the society.

The importance of DR. DAVID NELSON in the founding and maintenance of Mission Institute, Quincy’s abolitionist-oriented educational institution, has been previously discussed. Dr. Nelson was originally a slaveholder who became convinced of the error of holding property in men and freed his slaves. According to one biographer, Nelson was converted to abolitionism by Theodore D. Weld in 1835. In any event, he was employed as an agent by the American Home Missionary Society for at least six months in 1837, but he resigned this commission to devote more time to the Mission Institute and to accept an agency with the American Anti-Slavery Society. Nelson was also instrumental in the founding of the Illinois State Anti-Slavery Society and the promotion of the Liberty Party in the state. He died on October 17, 1844, little more than a year after the burning of the chapel at the Institute.

One of Dr. Nelson’s closest associates at Mission Institute was MOSES HUNTER. Hunter was born in the state of New York and received, according to Eastman, a "thorough liberal education," though Eastman
doesn't know where he obtained it. He had served as a minister in Almond, Allegheny County, New York for several years when he heard of Nelson's enterprise in Illinois. After a preliminary visit, he returned in 1838 with his family and "quite a company" of young men and women. With this group he formed "Mission Institute No. 2." He organized a church there, "on the genuine union principle," and, though Hunter was a Congregationalist and Nelson a Presbyterian, there was no friction. The church was "generally regarded as an aggressive and reformatory institution, and the members were enthusiastically in unity in the antislavery movement. . . ."10 Fugitives were always welcome here and could find a helping hand at any hour of the day or night. In many instances Hunter was confronted by the angry slaveholders and denounced as the leader of a pack of "nigger stealers."11 He was known as a forceful preacher and a respected and well-liked teacher. After suffering a near-fatal fall from his horse, he fought back and recovered enough strength to begin a journey to the East. Stopping at Philo Carpenter's home in Chicago he was taken ill and died a few months after Nelson. The Mission Institute never recovered from the blow of the deaths of these two men.12

ALANSON WORK, one of the three imprisoned for aiding slaves to escape from Missouri in 1841, was born in Middletown, Connecticut and came to Quincy in 1835. He was described as an "industrious mechanic of about 40 years old." He was known as a staunch abolitionist. Work had a wife and four children at the time of his imprisonment. He and his family lived at the Institute where he was employed as a handyman and Sunday school teacher. After his release in 1845 he returned to Connecticut.13
The second of those arrested in 1841 was JAMES E. BURR. Burr was from Western New York and was a student at the Mission Institute. He was one of the two who first made contact with the slaves in Missouri. Burr was pardoned after being imprisoned four years, six months, and seventeen days. After his release he moved to Bureau County where he spent the rest of his life.  

The last of this trio of "slave-stealers" was GEORGE THOMPSON who came from Licking County, Ohio. Like Burr he was a student at Mission Institute and took pains to put his antislavery principles in action. Thompson was the last of the three to be released, having served almost five years of his twelve-year sentence.  

JIREH PLATT was the "President, General Passenger Agent and train dispatcher" for the stations around Mendon. Deacon Platt was born at North Milford, Connecticut in 1798. He had little schooling and spent his youth in apprenticeship as a house joiner. He married in 1822 and worked for a clock manufacturer until he moved to Mendon in 1833. He had "become a Christian" soon after his marriage and served as a deacon in the Mendon Congregational Church from 1835 until his death in 1870. Deacon Platt was one of the earliest abolitionists in the county. In addition to his efforts on behalf of the fugitive, he was also an active supporter of the American Missionary Association.  

SAMUEL SNEDEKER was born in Middlesex County, New Jersey, January 27, 1802. He was educated in schools around Trenton, New Jersey though "the facilities at that early day were not very good for obtaining an education." He was employed for a while in a grocery and dry goods store and later, in 1830, was appointed deputy keeper of the
state penitentiary in Trenton. He held this position until 1844 when he moved to a farm near Jerseyville, Illinois. During his residence in Jersey County he acquired a good deal of property and was known as one of the well-to-do farmers of the area. In religion, Mr. Snedeker was a Baptist, and in politics, successively a Whig, a Free-Soiler, and a Republican. 17

ISAAC SNEDEKER, the younger brother of Samuel, was born at Four Mile Ferry, New Jersey, November 22, 1812. After receiving an elementary education, he worked on his father's farm and then on various transportation projects such as the Camden and Amboy Railroad and the Delaware and Raritan Canal. In 1834 he moved to a farm he had purchased in Monroe County, New York. He engaged in farming in this locale until 1844 when he moved to Illinois. Like his brother, Isaac acquired a considerable amount of land and was ranked as one of the leading farmers in the area. He too, was a Baptist and a Whig. He imbied antislavery views early in life and was president of the Jersey County Anti-Slavery Society for some time. Both of the Snedeker brothers were known to be friends of the fugitives. 16

One of the first settlers in Jerseyville, GEORGE W. BURKE, arrived in that locality in 1834. He was born in Addison County, Vermont, November 24, 1807 and was raised in Onondaga County, New York. It was here that he received some education and learned the trade of blacksmithing. Though he followed this occupation for a short time after moving to Illinois, Mr. Burke soon turned to farming and real estate to make his livelihood. He had been an abolitionist from his youth, perhaps influenced by the revivals then "burning over" western
New York. He was known as an enterprising and public-spirited man, though he was often criticized for his abolitionist leanings. 19

NEWELL L. ADAMS was another of the first settlers of Jerseyville, arriving in 1833. He was born in Halifax, Vermont, February 3, 1796, received an education near his home, and worked on his father's farm during the early years of his life. On coming to Jerseyville, he continued his pursuit of agriculture and, in addition, built the first steam mill in the county. Mr. Adams was a member of the Baptist Church. Politically, he first affiliated with the Democratic party. He later became a Whig and finally, a Republican. He was a staunch friend of freedom and equal rights. Adams was known as the "general manager and adviser" in all matters pertaining to fugitives. An acquaintance of Adams asserted that, "He was always consulted about slaves that were being run through the county." 20

Another of the agents at Jerseyville, PEYTON C. WALKER, was a Virginian, born in October, 1811. He spent most of his youth and received his early education in Portsmouth, Ohio where his parents had moved after his birth. At age seventeen Walker was apprenticed to a carpenter. He followed this trade for some twenty-five years. In 1835 he moved from Ohio to Alton, Illinois where he married the step-daughter of Newell Adams in 1837. In 1838 he moved to Jerseyville and built the first church in that community. A member of the Baptist Church from his youth, Mr. Walker was "turned out" of the church at Jerseyville because of his antislavery sentiments. Several others of similar leanings left the church after Mr. Walker's expulsion from the congregation. He was a member of the Whig and, later, the Republican
parties and was known as a friend of the fugitive. 21

HARLEY E. HAYES was born in Addison County, Vermont in 1813 and came West to Illinois in 1837. He settled in Jersey County in 1840. His farm was a known haven for fugitives and on one occasion he reportedly "blacked" his face and arms and rode off rapidly from his place to draw off a group of slave-catchers from their real quarry. The ruse was successful and the black was apparently aided on his way by other agents. 22

CHARLES WOOD was born in Darlington, South Carolina, January 9, 1798. He emigrated to Bond County, Illinois in the fall of 1826. He was a school teacher, having himself received a "good education for that time." He was not a church member as he apparently did not feel that membership in a church was necessary. His home was noted as a haven for strangers—of whatever hue—and he sought to aid all who passed his way. 23

GEORGE DAVIS was born in Ireland in 1814. He came to Galesburg in the 1830s and was an active member of the First Congregational Church. Politically, he was a Whig and later a Republican. He held several political offices including city, township and county treasurer, and assistant U.S. assessor. He also served as treasurer of Knox College for several years. Davis's stand on slavery was, like many Galesburgers, quite extreme. In May, 1855, for example, Davis and fifteen others signed a call for a meeting of those who believed slavery to be the "sum of all villainies," and that it "is in conflict with the Bible and the Constitution... and cannot be legalized by any enactment." Though the reason for this meeting was to plot some sort
of political action, the extremity of the views of Davis and the
others made a successful political campaign impossible. 24

NEHEMIAH WEST came to Galesburg from western New York in 1836.
Like most of this early group of settlers, West had been thoroughly
inculcated with the Puritan interests in religion and education. To
promote the second of these, he went to Vandalia with James Knox, a
politician from Knoxville, to obtain a charter for Knox Manual Labor
College. His antislavery feelings were also readily apparent. He
was involved in the litigation in the Borders case since he allegedly
had helped to secrete Borders' slaves. The charges against West were
dropped in 1843. Apparently West, "the leading layman of the Gales-
burg colony," continued to aid fugitives whenever the opportunity
presented itself. 25

The founder of the Galesburg colony, GEORGE W. GALE, was a
Presbyterian clergyman who was one of the spearheads of the Great
Revival in western New York and a resolute promoter of manual labor
education. Gale was born in Separate, Duchess County, New York,
December 3, 1789. He was orphaned at an early age and was raised by
his eight sisters. He studied at the Latin School in Troy, New York
and later earned a degree at Union Seminary in 1814. Though he attended
Princeton Seminary from time to time, he did not graduate from that
institution. He was licensed to preach in 1816 and began a career as
an itinerant minister. His interest in manual labor spurred him to
found the Oneida Institute in New York and later, during the mid-
thirties, to organize a group of settlers to found a new manual labor
school in the West. Gale was also keenly interested in and involved
with the antislavery movement. He was instrumental in the founding of antislavery societies in northern Illinois and was described by an opponent as "the great champion of abolitionism in Illinois." Gale attended the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1839 and was the only Illinoisan to appear in the deliberations of the national group. In the split that developed at that meeting Gale sided with the New York group against the Garrisonians. He was one of the chief operators of the underground railroad in Galesburg and a supporter of the establishment of the Liberty Party in the state. 26

WILLIAM T. ALLAN was perhaps one of the most militant abolitionists to settle in northern Illinois. Allan was born in Alabama but had gone to Lane Seminary in Cincinnati to study. After the famous "debate" at that institution, Allan was elected president of the newly-formed student abolition society. After the "rebels" left Lane, Allan went to Oberlin and from there to a career as an antislavery agitator. He lived for a time at Carrollton and then in Macoupin County. Later he moved to Chatham, Springfield, and then Peoria. In each of these localities Allan actively promoted abolitionism, though he met with considerable opposition at times. He finally moved to Geneseo in 1844. He was active in the Illinois State Anti-Slavery Society from its inception in 1837. 27

ELI P. WILSON was born in Litchfield County, Connecticut in 1814. His family moved to Illinois around 1830, and he attended two years of high school in Canton (1834-1836). He followed a teaching career and was a member of the Congregational Church. Wilson had been opposed to slavery from his youth and was known as a "liberal minded
and reformatory" in his views. His home was a noted station on the underground railroad in Peoria County. 28

EBENEZER S. PHELPS was a Congregationalist who was one of the prime movers in the founding of Princeton, Illinois. He was born in Northampton, Massachusetts, November 15, 1807. In 1831 Deacon Phelps led a group of settlers to northern Illinois and founded the Hampshire colony (later Princeton). Deacon Phelps was a man of strong anti-slavery principles. In spite of this, or because of it, he was elected to serve the community in several official posts. 29

JOHN CLAPP was born in Hampshire, Massachusetts, October 1, 1814. He came to Illinois in October, 1834 and settled in Clarion Township near LaMoille. He was also a member of the Congregational Church and followed the occupation of a farmer and stock raiser at which he was considered quite successful. Clapp's home was known as a haven for the fugitive. He too, was active in the politics of the county, having served as a county supervisor and for twelve years as a commissioner of highways. 30

JUDGE JOHN LEEPER was a native of Bedford County, Pennsylvania, born August 23, 1786. He lived in Brown County, Ohio for some time then moved to Bond County, Illinois in 1816. He left Bond County for Jacksonville in 1823, went to Putnam County in 1831, and finally settled in Bureau County in 1833. Judge Leeper was known as a leader in every community in which he lived. He was an elder in the Presbyterian Church and was a strong opponent of slavery. According to his son, "father's house was always a hiding place for fugitives." 31
RODERICK B. FRARY was born in Whately, Massachusetts, January 28, 1821 and went to Illinois in 1842. He lived in LaMoille continuously except from 1857 to 1861 when he served as County Treasurer and resided in Princeton. Like a good many of those who settled in Bureau County, Frary was a Congregationalist and an opponent of slavery. He supported the Liberty Party and later the Free Soilers and Republicans. He aided fugitives to escape on several occasions, though there is no evidence that he ever harbored a runaway slave at his own home.

Undoubtedly the most noted agent in Bureau County—if not in the entire state—was OWEN LOVEJOY. Lovejoy had only limited schooling in his youth and did various types of farm work until he was eighteen. At that point he determined to teach school and put himself through Bowdoin College. In 1836 Lovejoy went to Alton to join his brother, Elijah. When the latter was shot in 1837, Owen vowed to carry on his antislavery work. He moved to Princeton in 1839 as a replacement for the minister of the Hampshire Colony Presbyterian Church, Lucien Farnham, who had been taken ill. Before a year was up, Farnham had resigned his post, and Lovejoy became the regular minister. Though his antislavery stance was at first met with hostility, Lovejoy continued to preach on the subject. Besides preaching antislavery sermons, Lovejoy made his home a station on the underground railroad. His activity in this endeavor was widely known and he even went so far as to advertise it in the Western Citizen. The prosecution of Lovejoy in the Agnes-Nancy case merely added to his prestige. He was elected to Congress in 1856 by over 6,000 votes and returned in
1858, 1860, and 1862. Until his death in 1864 Lovejoy espoused the abolition crusade and supported the movement in every way he could. 33

JACOB BAKER, a Methodist preacher, settled in Whiteside County, Illinois in 1839 and moved to Union Grove in 1842. He had been born in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania, October 6, 1796. He lived for a time in Ohio where he joined the Washingtonian (temperance) Society in 1830 and an abolition society in 1834. After coming to Illinois he took an active part in the abolition movement—both by operating a station on the underground railroad and by working for the Liberty Party ticket in 1840. 34

ROBERT G. CLENDENIN was also from Pennsylvania having been born in Lancaster County, January 17, 1812. He moved to Illinois in 1836 settling first at Plainfield. The next year he moved to Fenton Township in Whiteside County and settled finally near Lyndon in 1844. He was early a member of the Liberty Party and possessed a deep conviction on the subject of universal freedom. It was said of Mr. Clendenin that a fugitive "always found him ready to afford protection from the pursuer and to assist him to a land where the Fugitive Slave Law had no binding force or effect. The underground railroad had no more efficient engineer than Mr. Clendenin." 35

NAHUM GOULD was born in Warwick, Massachusetts in 1798. He attended the Academy at New Salem and taught school until he entered Amherst College, from which he graduated in 1828. Upon graduation he studied theology with Dr. John Woodbridge, was ordained in the Presbyterian church and was appointed a missionary in the State of New York. He, his wife and children, and a sister-in-law left for Illinois in
May, 1834. The Goulds settled first at Union Grove. The Rev. Mr. Gould established churches at Hennepin, Union Grove, Vermillionville, Plainfield, and Rockwell. In 1839 Gould moved his family to Troy Grove, where he preached, taught school, and aided fugitives. He continued to serve several of the surrounding towns as an itinerant preacher until the late 'fifties.36

WILLIAM A. HICKOCK came to Illinois from Grand Isle, Vermont, and settled in Union Grove in 1834. He later moved to Bailey's Point, then to Granville, and finally to Troy Grove in 1836. He kept a store and an inn known as the Green Mountain House. He was a deacon in the Presbyterian church and worked with Nahum Gould and others in the vicinity to forward freight northward.37

One of the few personal records of underground railroad activity was kept by SAMUEL G. WRIGHT. Born in Hanover, New Hampshire in 1809, Wright moved to Canton, Illinois in 1830. In 1832 he joined the Presbyterian church, and five years later he enrolled in Lane Seminary. He was ordained to preach in 1840. In 1841 he accepted an agency with the American Home Missionary Society and moved to "Nigger Point" in Stark County. He served the Stark County area as itinerant minister for the next several years. During this period he was actively engaged in aiding runaways via the underground railroad. According to his "Journal" Wright aided at least 33 fugitives between August 1, 1842 and September 18, 1854. He was a witness in the trial of John Cross for harboring a fugitive, and was himself indicted, though the charges against him were later dropped. In addition to his antislavery activity, Wright was a leader in promoting education in Stark County. He
was also made a trustee of Knox College in 1849.\footnote{38}

WILLIAM KIRBY was born in Middletown, Connecticut, July 10, 1805. He attended Yale College, graduated in 1827, and then studied in the Yale Divinity School for three years. He was one of the founders of Illinois College at Jacksonville and spent two years as a teacher there. After this he was pastor of churches at Union Grove, Blackstone Grove, and Mendon. He was an agent of the AME and, in that capacity, organized some forty-one churches. His son, Edward, noted that this agency kept his father away from home for long periods and consequently, slaves were often aided by his wife and children rather than by Kirby himself.\footnote{39}

DR. CHARLES VOLNEY DYER, one of the most famous agents in Chicago, was born in Clarendon, Vermont, June 12, 1808. He received a "good general academic education," and then studied medicine at Middlebury College in Vermont from which he was graduated in 1830. He opened a medical practice in Newark, New Jersey and labored there until 1835 when he moved to Chicago and opened an office in that city. In 1839 he held the post of city physician. A few years later, however, he gave up his medical practice to pursue his interests in real estate. He was regarded as "one of the most active and persistent opponents of slavery" and was always ready to aid a fugitive slave on his way to Canada.\footnote{40}

ZEBINA EASTMAN, the well-known abolitionist editor, was born in North Amherst, Massachusetts, September 8, 1815. He was orphaned at an early age and was apprenticed to a printer when he was fourteen. He determined to get an education and entered the academy at Hadley,
Massachusetts, "with a view to preparation for a collegiate course."
When poor health forced abandonment of these plans, Eastman returned to printing. Sometime during this period he acquired antislavery principles, and when he lost his inheritance in an ill-fated investment in a newspaper at Fayetteville, Vermont, he went West to "devote himself to the cause of human freedom." In 1839 he joined Benjamin Lundy in the publication of the Genius of Universal Emancipation. After Lundy's death Eastman and Hooper Warren published the Genius of Liberty as the successor to Lundy's paper. In 1842 Eastman moved to Chicago and established the Western Citizen which he published until 1853. Eastman's antislavery sentiments were constantly in evidence as he helped many a fugitive to obtain passage over the lakes. With Dr. Dyer and Philo Carpenter he provided such organization as existed in the underground railroad operations in Chicago.41

PHILO CARPENTER was born February 27, 1805 in Savoy, Massachusetts. He received a good common school education, supplemented by a few terms at the Academy at South Adams. He decided on a medical career and entered a drugstore in Troy, New York with Amatus Robbins, where he clerked and studied and eventually gained a half interest in the business. In 1830 Carpenter was converted and joined the First Presbyterian church (possibly under the influence of Charles G. Finney who had preached there shortly before). In 1832 he emigrated to Ft. Dearborn (Chicago) and set up a drugstore. His business expanded and flourished until he sold it in 1843 to devote his time to his real estate interests. The controversy over slavery also commanded his attention and action. He was a patron of Elijah Lovejoy's Observer
and helped Zebina Eastman to establish the Western Citizen. He withdrew from the Presbyterian church in 1851 when that body refused to denounce slavery and slaveholders. He helped form the First Congregational Church of Chicago that same year. Known as one of the chief agents of the underground railroad in Chicago, he is reported to have aided over 200 fugitives to safety in Canada. 42

The sketches given here come nowhere near encompassing all those who were connected with the underground railroad in Illinois. However, they probably are representative of the type of men who became involved in this endeavor. In many cases the agents were prominent members of their respective communities. A large number were farmers for at least part of their lives, though they were often engaged in other occupations as well. Ministers and ministerial students formed the nucleus for underground activities in such localities as Quincy, Galesburg, and Jacksonville. Students, however, were only one component. The majority of the agents were over thirty—not what one would call young "rabble-rousers."

Religious affiliations, too, were varied, though the largest number seem to have been members of Congregational or Presbyterian churches. A few Baptists took part in this endeavor as did some Methodists and Scotch Covenanters. The one religious group that appears to be totally unrepresented is the Roman Catholic.

Political associations were more homogeneous. Most agents tended to be Whigs in their early lives and then to become Republicans when that party made its appearance after 1854. A number of those discussed above were associated with the Liberty and Free Soil parties.
These political groups never attracted a substantial following, however, and from the data gathered here it seems safe to say that only the most dedicated would join these parties.

Up to this point little mention has been made of black agents on the underground railroad. The reason is simple: information on the participation of blacks in this work is extremely rare. Mention has already been made of aid given by blacks at Alton and Quincy. 43

An article in the Jacksonville Daily Journal mentions that Ben Henderson, a Negro, was one of the most prominent workers in that locality. 44 No other mention of Henderson's activity has been turned up, however. The same problem exists with a Negro by the name of Stewart who reportedly kept a station on Macoupin Creek in Greene County until he was forced to leave the area by proslavery sympathizers. 45 Besides these sparse bits of information, there are only the charges by Southerners of the collusion of blacks in this operation. Newspapers from Missouri and other states cried out against the actions of the blacks who helped their property to run off. 46

The paucity of information on black participation in the underground railroad in Illinois can be logically explained. First, the free black population of the state was never very great in the ante-bellum years. It totalled only 7,628 in 1860. 47 Secondly, the blacks who did reside in the state in the decades 1830-1860 were heavily concentrated in a few areas. Until 1850 this concentration was in the southern counties. After this date there were increasing numbers of blacks in a few more northern counties—especially Adams, Cook, and Sangamon. 48 Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, blacks just were
not recognized in the county histories upon which one must rely for much of this information. In Illinois most of these histories were compiled between 1875 and 1910—a period when the black did not enjoy a particularly high place in American society and was generally relegated to an even lower place in the writing of history. There was no vigilance committee in Illinois organized and run by blacks as there was in Philadelphia, from whose records the researcher may obtain an idea of the extent of black participation. Thus, this aspect of the underground railroad operation can only be conjectured.

Though the blacks who undoubtedly assisted in the operations of the underground railroad in some places had a readily apparent reason for such action, the motives of white agents are somewhat more complex. There is no evidence that aid was given out of the love of the blacks per se. However, there are two considerations which appear to have played a part in inducing agents to give aid to the fugitives: 1) religious convictions, and 2) the thrill of providing help in defiance of both the law and public opinion.

The more important of these was religious. Following the Biblical admonition,

You shall not hand over to his master a slave who has taken refuge from him with you. Let him live with you wherever he chooses, in any one of your communities that pleases him. Do not molest him. Deut. 23: 16-17.

was seen as necessary to salvation by a good number of these agents.

In order to carry this conviction into practice it was necessary to circumvent the laws. Justification for this evasion was found in the "higher law" doctrine. Divine law superseded all human laws and
nullified any that ran counter to it. This argument was used with increasing regularity after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, though it had been enunciated previously. The consequences of breaking the law were well understood and generally accepted with an air of martyrdom. The trials of violators of fugitive slave laws were given considerable publicity in the abolitionist press, and those indicted often wrote accounts of their trial for publication. For example, during the succession of events surrounding his arrest in 1843, John Cross held his prosecutors up to public ridicule and made himself the hero of the episode.

Those who disobeyed the statute law did not consider themselves criminals; rather they were better men for their transgression. The Rev. H. H. Hinman, himself a conductor on the underground railroad, stated the view of the usual agent clearly and concisely. He noted first that those who aided fugitives "were not disloyal or rebellious." Instead they were God-fearing men—and women—who recognized their obligation to obey the divine ordinances before those of men. They were "willing to suffer for conscience's sake and to commit their reputation to the seber second thought of their fellow men." These men were "moved by common impulse of humanity and bound by no law but the law of love."

A second, though perhaps not less important, reason for aiding fugitives was the excitement of the activity. A number of agents voiced this sentiment as a reason for proffering aid to the fugitive. There was a certain romantic adventure in conveying the supposedly helpless black from the "house of bondage" to the "land of freedom,"
especially if one were hotly pursued by the evil slave-catchers. H. D. Platt, whose father was chief agent at Mendon, and who himself often aided in conveying fugitives, asserted that,

There was a peculiar fascination about that underground railroad biz., that fires me up, even now when I recall the scenes of excitement and danger. I cannot understand it, but the men & boys who were in it thor'ly enjoyed its adven-ture.55

Of course any attempt to determine motivation of this group of men more than a century after the event is fraught with pitfalls. However, the commitment to the "higher law" doctrine and the desire for adventure are two themes that recur frequently in the records left by those who participated in or were in some way connected with the work. Hence, it seems safe to conclude that both of these reasons played a part in moving men to give aid to the fugitive.
ENDNOTES


2 David F. Wilcox, ed., Quincy and Adams County, Illinois (Chicago, Ill., 1919), I, 172. Collins' affiliation with the AMA is illustrated by a number of donations which he sent to aid the various endeavors of the Association. Frederick Collins to Lewis Tappan, Quincy, Illinois, February 16, 1854 and February 21, 1855, AMA Archives.

3 See above, pp. 23-24.


5 See above, p. 6.


7 Dr. David Nelson to Absalom Peters, Quincy, Ill., June 13, September 14, and December 1, 1837 "Illinois Letters," in the American Home Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Dillard University, New Orleans, La. DAB, XIII, 415. Gilbert H. Barnes says that Nelson's agency for the American Anti-Slavery Society was only "moderately successful" because of an increasing disability from epilepsy.


9 Richardson, "Dr. David Nelson," 453.


11 Ibid., 15.


13 Quincy Whig, July 24, 1841. Wilcox, Quincy and Adams County, 150-151.


18. Ibid., 27.


32. Roderick B. Frary to Siebert, LaMoille, Ill., August 3, 1896, Siebert Papers.


38. Muelder, *Fighters for Freedom*, 74-77. Samuel G. Wright, "Journal," typescript in the Knox College Library, Galesburg, Illinois. This journal is concerned largely with Wright's activities as a minister, i.e., conversions, baptisms, "back-sliders," etc. However, he does furnish a valuable insight into the operations of the underground railroad. For this aspect of his activity see entries for August 22, 1842; January 9, February 6, October 9, 16, 1843; June 24,
1844; January 5, July 26, 1847; June 6, 11, 1848; September 23, 1850; and July 24, September 18, 1854.


41 Ibid., 69-70.


43 See above, pp. 4 and 23.


47 U.S. Census Office, Preliminary Report on the Eighth Census, 1860 (Washington, D.C., 1862), 128-131. This report showed the blacks in the state as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Slave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>1,637</td>
<td>747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>3,598</td>
<td>331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>5,436</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>7,628</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(258% increase) (18.5% increase) (11% increase) (55.6% decrease) (51% increase) (40% increase)

48 In 1830 for example, over half of the blacks lived in the southern counties of Randolph, Gallatin, White, St. Clair, Madison, and Lawrence. By 1840 the population had shifted northward somewhat, but the highest concentrations were still in Gallatin, Randolph, St. Clair, and Madison counties. By the time of the next census, Cook County had almost 400 blacks, Adams County almost 150, Sangamon County over 250, and Morgan County over 125. Gallatin and Randolph Counties contained about the same number of Negroes as Cook County. Madison and St. Clair counties had 449 and 581 blacks, respectively. The complete figures can be found in, U.S. Census Office, Fifth Census:

49 For a discussion of the black's place in the northern literature of the period see, Rayford W. Logan, Betrayal of the Negro, From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson (New York, 1967).

50 This justification recurs again and again in the letters Siebert received from former agents and their relatives and acquaintances. For example, see Levy C. Maynard to Siebert, Terre Haute, Ill., May 7, 1896, Siebert Papers. Deacon Jireh Platt echoed these feelings in two letters to the AMA, June 17, 1851 and October 10, 1854, AMA Archives.

51 See above, p. 32. The Western Citizen of October 28, 1842 published a "Discourse on Fugitives" which destroyed the legal arguments for returning fugitives and set forth the "higher law" doctrine.

52 See the Western Citizen, July 13, August 3, October 19 and 26, 1843, and February 22, 1844 for examples of this type of reporting.

53 These incidents are reported in Chapman, History of Knox County, 212-213. A somewhat more detailed—and perhaps embellished—account can be found in Matson, Reminiscences of Bureau County, 367-370.


CHAPTER FOUR
THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD--
LEGEND AND REALITY

Regardless of the motivation of its agents, the underground railroad had at least two important results: 1) it aided some blacks to reach Canada, and 2) it provided grist for abolitionist propaganda mills and thereby added to sectional tensions. The legends that have grown up around this endeavor do not alter these facts nor do they make them any less important.

Blacks from the United States were emigrating to Canada at least as early as the late 1820s.¹ That this movement of slaves was a source of irritation to the South is indicated by a resolution of the House of Representatives in 1828 requesting to know what progress was being made with respect to "negotiations with the British Government, relative to the surrender of fugitive slaves who may have taken refuge within the Canadian Provinces belonging to said Government."² In response to this request, it was reported that negotiations with the British had been entered upon to effect, among other things, "a mutual surrender of all persons held to service or labor, under the laws of one party, who escape into the territories of the other." These negotiations were necessary "to provide for a growing evil, which has produced some, and, if it be not shortly checked, is likely to produce much more irritation."³

65
Unfortunately for the slaveholders, the British refused to accede to this request. It was argued that to do so would be contrary to British law and accepted precedent in British courts. In addition, such an agreement would have an adverse effect on British public opinion which, at that time, was also being agitated by abolitionist elements. 4 With the failure of this early attempt to destroy the Canadian haven, the emigration continued—and perhaps increased—until the Civil War.

Blacks who fled to Canada generally settled in what is now the western and southern parts of Ontario. Such towns as London, Windsor, St. Catherines, and Toronto attracted numbers of fugitives from the United States. 5 In addition, several colonies were begun expressly for the fugitives. The most noted of these were at Wilberforce, Dawn, and the Elgin (or Buxton) settlement. Though they enjoyed differing degrees of success, these three settlements provided a place for Negroes to live, work, and prove that they were capable of taking care of themselves. 6

The conditions of the fugitives apparently varied considerably; yet even those in the worst condition found their situations more advantageous than slavery. 7 Reports of missionaries to Canada corroborate the testimony of those with whom Benjamin Drew spoke in 1855. Some of these missionaries, like Isaac Rice and David Hotchkiss, expressed rather strong doubts that blacks would ever be able to completely care for themselves. Their reports to the American Missionary Association were filled with dire predictions of the necessity of increased and continued aid to the poor, destitute fugitive. 8
Other missionaries, particularly Hiram Wilson and Henry Bibb, were more convinced of the blacks' ability to take care of themselves and even become prosperous. These two missionaries, while thanking those who sent food, clothing, and money to the fugitives, emphasized that this should be a temporary expedient. Continued gifts to the blacks would only make them lazy and unwilling to care for themselves. 9

The reports of these missionaries give a fairly complete picture of life among the fugitives in Canada. They point out the freedoms enjoyed by blacks and often, the prejudice that existed there as well. 10 Canada was apparently not quite the "land of freedom" that abolitionist accounts depicted. It was, however, a tremendous improvement over slavery.

As has been previously mentioned, it is nearly impossible to estimate the number of blacks who escaped to Canada in the ante-bellum years. Census figures for both the United States and Canada are inaccurate at best. 11 Yet, if one accepts the figure of 1,000 fugitives per year as a reasonable average, that would mean that some 30,000 fugitives left the South in the three ante-bellum decades. This is considerably less than the losses claimed by many Southerners. 12

Estimates of the numbers of blacks who actually entered Canada are equally inexact. Benjamin Drew, while accepting the report of 30,000 blacks in Canada in 1852, counted only some 6,000 in the communities he visited. 13 The generally cited figure lies somewhere between 20,000 and 40,000. 14 This is a significant number of blacks in spite of the fact that it is relatively small when compared with the total number of slaves in the United States. In this respect then, the under-
ground railroad enjoyed only limited success. The vast majority of
slaves were left in bondage. Frederick Douglass felt that the operation
of the underground railroad often harmed the slaves by putting the
slaveholder on his guard and adding "to his facilities for capturing
his slaves."15 Whether this was true or not, it does not seem to
have influenced most agents in Illinois. They aided any who came their
way and, at least in their own minds, did a service for the fugitive
and enhanced their own spiritual well-being.

The second effect of the underground railroad was the height-
ening of sectional tension by means of abolitionist accounts of escapes
and the southern reactions to them. Though individual agents in Illi-
nois gave little thought to this aspect of the work (excepting of course
men like Owen Lovejoy and John Cross who apparently enjoyed and recog-
nized the value of taunting slaveowners), it was an important element
in the work. Fugitive slave escapes were recounted in the Western
Citizen in an almost mocking tone.16 This added to the air of righteous-
ness of the abolitionists and irked proslavery sympathizers even more.

A number of proslavery reactions such as the formation of
"Anti-Negro Stealing Societies" and the loud outcries from the pro-
slavery press have already been mentioned. A propaganda "war" was
waged between the antislavery and proslavery forces, and the sectional
antipathy which this conflict fostered should not be minimized. It is
in this area that Professor Gara's work appears to be most useful. He
has underscored the importance of the underground railroad as a propa-
ganda tool.17
It is not necessary, however, in admitting the propaganda value of the underground railroad, to deny its existence in a more concrete form. There were in Illinois a number of men of antislavery views who were willing to aid any fugitive who presented himself, and who did, in fact, give such aid. They did so out of a deep religious conviction and out of a spirit of adventure. They were willing to accept the consequences of their actions if they were caught and often turned this apparent defeat into a moral victory which, when publicized, would serve to convert others to the crusade. The men who took part in this work were, by and large, practical men. In addition to aiding fugitives, they supported political action to abolish slavery. Through each of these means—aiding fugitives, political action, and propaganda—the abolition cause was agitated and promoted.

Thus, though it can be correctly said that a relatively small number of slaves escaped, and that some of those that did did so on their own, the importance of the underground railroad in the anti-slavery movement is not thereby significantly diminished. It provided a wealth of propaganda for the abolitionist cause as well as for that of the Southern extremists. It seems safe to say that the activity of the underground railroad contributed in a major way to the sectional tensions which built to the breaking point in 1860.
ENDNOTES

1 Siebert, The Underground Railroad, 192-193.

2 U.S. Congress, House, Message from the President of the United States...in relation to Negotiations with G. Britain upon the subject of Fugitive Slaves, H. Doc. 19, 20th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1828, 1.

3 Ibid., 2.

4 Ibid., 3-6.

5 For a description of the Negro inhabitants of these and other communities see Drew, North-side View of Slavery.


7 None of the fugitives interviewed by Drew felt that they were in a less advantageous position in Canada, though some did say that they would like to return to the United States if it were safe to do so. Drew, North-side View of Slavery, 90, 110 and passim.

8 Isaac Rice to the Executive Committee of the AMA, Amherstburg, Canada West, October 19, 1848, and September 21, 1849; David Hotchkiss to Rev. Geo. Whipple, Malden, Canada West, December 14, 1850, Canadian letter file, AMA Archives.

9 Henry Bibb to the Ex. Committee of the Am. Missionary Association, Sandwich, Canada West, April 14, 1851; Hiram Wilson to George Whipple, Dawn Mills, C.W., December 4, 1849; Hiram Wilson to Geo. Shipple, St. Catherines, C.W., November 22, 1850; April 24, 1851, November 20, 1851, Canadian letter file, AMA Archives.

10 Hiram Wilson to George Whipple, St. Catherines, C.W., March 4, 1851; David Hotchkiss to Rev. George Whipple, Windsor, C.W., November 9, 1855, Canadian letter file, AMA Archives. Many of those Drew inter-


12 Siebert, *The Underground Railroad*, 341-42. The estimates of Southerners ranged as high as 100,000 slaves lost in the four decades, 1810-1850.


16 Examples of the reports of successful slave escapes may be found in the *Western Citizen* on the following and other dates: April 6, November 2, 16, 1843; March 6, July 3, 1845; November 3, 1846; January 18, November 23, 1847; November 22, 1850; and June 10, 1851.

17 Larry Gara, "Propaganda Uses of the Underground Railroad," *Mid-America*, XXII (1952), 165-171, and chapters 6 and 7 of the *Liberty Line*, provide a detailed study of the use of the underground railroad as a propaganda tool by both North and South.
ABBREVIATIONS

Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society - JISHS

Journal of Negro History - JNH

Missouri Valley Historical Review - MVHR
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