

Decatur County's Part in the Historic Underground Railway of Slavery Days
Prepared by N. T. Rogers
Taken from The Greensburg News February 1914

Chapter I
Introductory

This article is the outgrowth of an investigation begun when we were gathering information for the columns of the NEWS concerning the write-ups of the towns of Clarksburg, Kingston, and Spring Hill.

The search for materials has been carried on at intervals during the past three months, and great patience and care have been required to overcome the difficulties attaching to a subject that is in an extraordinary sense a hidden one and the writer has constantly tried to observe those well known dicta of the historian, namely, to be content with the materials discovered without making additions of his own, and to let his conclusions be defined by the facts, rather than seek to cast these "in the mould of his hypothesis."

Our first task was to gather the material concerning the Fugit township Underground Railroad, and the characteristic of this story is to consider the whole question on a basis of established facts. The effort is, indeed, timely, for there are but few living in the township now who know the intimate history of the former secret system of transportation; and these invaluable details are fast disappearing with the death of the actors in the drama. We have, in this article, rescued and put into print events which, in a few short years, mayhap months, will have ceased to be in the memory of living men; in fact, we have collected and here publish fast perishing materials.

The quiet recital of the facts has all the charm of romance, no matter whether the "passengers" on the Underground Railroad were traveling by night in a procession of covered wagons, or boldly by day in disguise; whether boxed up as so much freight, or riding on passes unhesitatingly given by Abolitionist directors of railroads; the fugitives in those days rejoiced in the prospect of liberty and freedom.

Neither Whittier in his poems, nor Harriet Beecher Stowe in her novels, imagined a more picturesque incident than the crossing of the Ohio River at Rising Sun by James Shannon's "gang" of twelve rescued souls singing: "I'm on my way to Canada, where colored folks are free," to the joyful accompaniment of their firearms.

The Underground Railroad was simply a form of combined defiance of National laws, on the ground that those laws were unjust and oppressive. It was the unconstitutional by logical refusal of people to acknowledge that they owed any regard to slavery or were bound to look on fleeing bondmen as the property of the slaveholders, no matter how the laws read. They naturally despised the doctrine of State sovereignty; they believed in the rights of the States but not in the sovereignty of the States; they recognized States as political conveniences; they believed that rising above States as the Alps above valleys were the rights of human beings; that rising above the rights of the Government are the sublime rights of the people; they believed the Government

good only so long as it protected human rights, but that the rights of human beings never should be sacrificed upon the altar of the States or upon the altar of the Nation; they declared human slavery could not be defended at the bar of public reason; that it was an institution that could not be defended in the high forum of human conscience; no man could stand there and defend the right to rob the cradle – none could defend the right to sell the babe from the breast of the agonized mother; none could defend the claim that lashes on a naked back were legal tender for labor performed; in short, the operators of this Underground Railroad believed in Liberty, Fraternity, Equality – the three grandest words in all the language of men. Liberty: Give to every man the fruit of his own labor – the labor of his hands and of his brain. Fraternity: Every man in the right is my brother. Equality: The rights of all are equal – no race, no color, no previous condition can change the rights of men.

The Underground Railroad was also a practical means of bringing anti-slavery principles to the attention of the lukewarm or pro-slavery people in free States; and of convincing the South that the Abolitionist movement was sincere and effective.

Above all, the Underground Railroad was the opportunity for the bold and adventurous; it had the excitement of piracy, the secrecy of burglary, the daring of insurrection; to the pleasure of relieving the poor negro's suffering it added the triumph of snapping one's fingers at the slave-catcher; it developed coolness, indifference to danger and quickness of resource.

All persons in Fugit township who opposed slavery were, naturally, the friends of the fugitive slave, and were ever ready to respond to his or her appeals for help. Shelter and food were readily supplied them, and they were directed or conveyed, generally in the night, to other stations and to sympathizing neighbors, until finally and without any forethought or management on their own part, they found themselves in Canada and free human beings.

These helpers, in the course of time came to be called agents, station-keepers, or conductors of the Underground Railroad.

The change of residence and death have made it impossible to obtain the names of all who belonged to this class of practical emancipationists, though we give elsewhere in this article quite a number – some three or four of whom are still living.

Chapter II

Considering the kind of labor performed and the danger involved, one is impressed with the unselfish devotion to principle of these emancipators.

There was for them, of course, no outward honor, no material recompense, but instead such contumely and seeming disgrace as can now be scarcely comprehended.

Nevertheless, these good men were rich in courage, and their hospitality was equal to all emergencies. They gladly gave aid and comfort to every negro seeking freedom, and the numbers befriended by many helpers despite penalties and abuse show with what moral determination the work was carried on.

Reticent as most of our underground operators were at the time, in regard to their unlawful acts, they did not attempt to conceal their principles. On the contrary, they were zealous

in their in their endeavors to make converts to a doctrine that seemed to them to have the combined warrant of Scripture and of their own conscience, and that agreed with the convictions of the fathers of the Republic.

The Golden Rule and the preamble of the Declaration of Independence they often recited in support of their position. When they had transgressed the Fugitive Slave Law of Congress they were wont to find their justification in the Fugitive Slave Law of the Mosaic institutions: "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which hath escaped unto thee; he shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose in one of thy gates where it liketh him best; thou shalt not oppress him."

They refused to observe a law that made it a felony in their opinion to give a cup of cold water to famishing men, women and children fleeing from servitude. Their faith and determination is clearly expressed in one of the old anti-slavery songs:

"'Tis the Law of God in the human soul,
'Tis the law in the Word Divine;
It shall live while the earth in its course shall roll,
It shall live in the soul of mine.
Let the law of the land forge its bonds of wrong
I shall help when the self-freed crave;
For the law in my soul, bright, beaming and strong,
Bids me succor the fleeing slave."

A certain Kingston preacher uttered but the sentiments of many Fugit township people when he said, at the conclusion of a sermon in 1850: "It is known to you that the Fugitive Slave Bill has become a law. To law framed of such iniquity I owe no allegiance. Humanity, Christianity, manhood revolt against it. For myself I say it solemnly, I will shelter, I will help, and I will defend the fugitive with all my humble means and power. I will act with any body of decent and serious men, as the head, or foot, or the hand, in any mode not involving the use of deadly weapons, to nullify and defeat the operation of this law."

It is not surprising, in view of the then unlawful nature of Underground Railroad Service, that extremely little in the way of contemporaneous documents has descended to us even across the short span of a generation, and that there are few written data for the history of a movement that gave liberty to a large number of slaves. The legal restraints upon the rendering of aid to slaves bent on flight to Canada were, of course, ever present in the minds of those that pitied the bondman, whether a well-informed citizen or an illiterate negro, who notwithstanding his fellow-feeling was yet sufficiently sagacious to avoid the open violation of what others might call the law of the land. Therefore, written evidence of complicity was for the most part carefully avoided; and little information concerning any part of the work of the Underground Railroad was allowed to get into print.

It is known that a few records and diaries were kept by certain helpers; and a few of the messages that passed between station-keepers have been preserved. These sources of information are as valuable as they are rare; they would doubtless be more plentiful if the Fugitive Slave Law

of 1850 had not created such consternation as to lead to the destruction of most of the “tell tale documents.” One Fugitive township citizen said to the writer: “Scores of escapes, harrowing separations, dreadful longings, dark gropings after lost parents, brothers, sisters, and identities, seemed to be pressing on my mind. While I knew the danger of keeping strict records, and while I did not then dream that in my day slavery would be blotted out, or that the time would come when I could publish these records, it used to afford me great satisfaction to take them down fresh from the lips of fugitives on the way to freedom, and to preserve them as they had given them.”

One diary is still extant, and shows entries covering a period of two years: The following items will illustrate sufficiently the character of the record:

“To U. G. Railroad Agent: June 10. Eliza Black and two children arrived safe on the U. G. Railroad at three o’clock this morning. The last hundred dollars for freedom she was to pay to John Jenkins, of Mercer county, Kentucky.”

“July 9, ’52. U.G.R.R. conductor reported the passage of six, all very valuable pieces of Ebony, and designated by names as follows: Hilary Moore, John Young, Daniel Hanks, Susie Brooks, Fannie Goss and Becca Cane. Three others were ticketed about midnight. Be on lookout.”

“Friday Morning: Business is arranged for Saturday night. Be on the lookout and if practicable let a carriage come and meet the caravan. (Signed) H.B.”

“May 6, Dear Sir: By tomorrow evening’s mail you will receive two volumes of the ‘Irrepressible Conflict’ bound in black. After perusal please forward and oblige. Yours truly, W.J.L.”

“Dear Sir: Uncle Tom says if the roads are not too bad you can look for those fleeces of wool by tomorrow night. Send them on to test the market and price. No back charges. Yours, Flint.”

Chapter III

Underground managers who were so indiscreet as to keep a diary or letters for a season, were induced to destroy such condemning evidence under the stress of special danger.

One gentleman relates that he kept a record of the fugitives that passed through his station and those of his co-workers for a long time, but after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Bill in 1850, he destroyed it. The record contained the name of the master of each fugitive, the fugitive’s own name and the new name given him.

In the conveyance of fugitives from station to station there existed all the variety of method one would expect to find. It was scarcely thought necessary to send a guide with men, unless some special reason for doing so existed. They were, therefore, commonly given such directions as they needed and left to their own devices.

As the number of refugees increased, and women and children were more frequently seen upon the Underground Railroad, and pursuit was more common, the practice of transporting fugitives on horseback, by vehicles, was introduced. The steam railroad was a new means

furnished by the progress of the times, and used by them with greater or less frequency as circumstances required, and when the safety of passengers would not be sacrificed even to boxing them and shipping as freight. When fugitive travelers afoot or on horseback found themselves pursued, safety lay in flight, unless indeed the company was large enough, courageous enough and sufficiently well armed to give battle.

The safety of fugitives, while traveling, lay mainly in their concealment, and many were the stratagems employed.

Characteristic of the service of the Underground Railroad were the covered wagons, closed carriages and deep-bedded farm wagons that hid passengers.

The men that drove wagons or carriages containing refugees, "conductors," as they came to be called in the terminology of the Underground Railroad service, generally took the precaution to have ostensible reasons for their journeys. They sought to divest excursions of the air of mystery by seeming to be about legitimate business.

The exigencies that determined in what direction an escaping slave should go during any particular part of his journey were, in the nature of the case, always local. The ultimate goal was Canada, but a safe passage was of greater importance than a quick one. When speed would contribute safety the guide would make a long trip with his charge or perhaps resort to the steam road, but under ordinary circumstances, a guide had almost always a choice between two or more routes; he could, as seemed best at the time, take the right-hand road to one station, or the left-hand road to another. In truth, the underground paths in these regions, formed a great and intricate network, and it was in no small measure because the lines forming the meshes of this great system converged and branched again at so many stations that it was almost an impossibility for slave-hunters to trace their negroes through even a single county without finding themselves on the wrong trail.

It was common stratagem in times of special emergency to switch off travelers from one course to another, or to take them back on their track and then, after a few days of waiting, send them forward again. It is, then, proper to say that zigzag was one of the regular devices to blind and throw off pursuit. It served moreover to avoid unfriendly localities. It seems probable that the circuitous land route from Kingston to Ohio was an expedient of this sort, for slave-owners and their agents were often known to be on the lookout along the direct throughfare between Indiana and Ohio.

During the long process by which the slave with the help of his friends was being transmitted into the freeman he spent much of his time in concealment. His progress was made in the nighttime. When a station was reached he was provided with a hiding place, and he scarcely left it until his host decided it would be safe for him to continue his journey.

The hiding places the fugitives entered first and last were as dissimilar as can well be imagined. Slaves that crossed the Ohio River at Rising Sun and fell into the hands of Alexander McCoy, were often concealed in his barn, which is said to have been provided with a secret cellar for use by the slaves when pursuers approached.

The barn of Cyrus Hamilton was a haven into which many slaves were piloted by way of McCoy's Station. A thicket in Mr. Hamilton's lot was sometimes resorted to, as was one of his hayricks that was hollow and had a blind entrance.

Luther Donnell had an out-of-the way corn pen that was kept in readiness and held many fugitive slaves.

The old log hut of Miles Meadows was one of the main stations, and an overhead loft in the hut was an accustomed hiding place for fugitive slaves.

The home of William Hamilton, at Clarksburg, was another main station, and the place of concealment of the fugitive was a rail pen covered with straw.

Andrew Robison made a station of his farm home and it was managed by one of the smoothest colored fellows ever in this section of country. His name was James Shannon, and he was a terror to the slave hunter. Associated with Mr. Shannon was a colored gentleman by the name of William Thompson who was not only an expert in aiding fugitives to make good their escape, but he was one among the most active and successful conductors of the Underground Railroad.

Chapter IV

Slave Hunters Organize in a Saloon.

A slave owner by the name of Wright Ray, of Kentucky, lost a woman slave and four children. The woman and children made their escape from Kentucky one night to Rising Sun, where they were taken care of by Underground Railroad men.

The next day William Thompson, a colored conductor of the Kingston Underground Railroad and whose home was at the Andrew Robison station near Kingston, was sent after the woman and children. Just after dark he left Rising Sun with the fugitives and reached the home and station of Alexander McCoy near McCoy's Station, about two o'clock the next morning, where they were hidden away in a cellar.

The following night Conductor Thompson and Robert A. Hamilton secretly conveyed them to the home and station of Miles Meadows, on the farm now owned by Quincy and Camilla Donnell, just north of Kingston.

By this time Wright Ray, the alleged "owner" of the woman and four children had reached Greensburg from Kentucky in search of the fugitives. He went to a "back alley" saloon that was located between Franklin and Broadway streets at or near the rear of where Lon Rader's saloon is now located. Here he held a meeting; secured five volunteer slave-hunters, and that night about half past ten o'clock they left Greensburg for the home and station of Miles Meadows, having received a "tip" that the fugitive woman and children were hidden there.

They reached the home of Meadows between eleven and twelve o'clock midnight, and knocked on the door for admission. Mr. Meadows was away from home doing duty on the Underground Railroad, but Mrs. Meadows was "on to her job," and was expecting and watching for just such a call. She answered the knock on the door by saying: "Wait till I'se gets dressed and den I will let you'se all in." She had her clothes on, but this was a scheme whereby she was

allotted time enough to conceal the woman and children up in the loft of her cabin – a place arranged for the express purpose of concealing fugitives.

Having assisted the woman and children to the loft, shown the woman the opening from the loft to the chimney, she climbed down, closed the trap-door, removed and concealed the ladder under the floor of the cabin, admitted the Ray gang, and while they were searching the house and closely questioning Mrs. Meadows concerning the fugitives, the colored woman and her children crawled out of the opening from the loft to the old stick and clay chimney and down to the ground where they made haste to a near by field, and where the woman concealed the four children in four different fodder shocks and then concealed herself by crawling into an old strawstack.

Foiled in Their Attempt

Ray and his gang of fugitive slave hunters, finding themselves foiled and outwitted by a colored woman in their attempt of capture, returned to Greensburg, slept through the day and returned to the Kingston neighborhood the next night, when they met with a “warm reception,” one they were not looking for, as a delegation had been formed by men of the Underground Railroad who had kept themselves posted as to the movements and plans of the Ray gang.

The members of the delegation or “reception committee” consisted of Luther A. Donnell, William Hamilton, R. A. Hamilton, Orlando Hamilton, Andrew Robison, Austin McCoy, Alexander McCoy and others, headed by Rev. A. T. Rankin, and each “delegate,”

Carried A Shot Gun.

This “reception committee” met the Ray gang of slave hunters just as they were approaching the Kingston neighborhood from the west and called them to a halt, when Rev. Rankin administered to them some “timely” advice which they heeded, and Ray, like the fellow who went to hunt bear, threw his gun away at the first sight of a big bear and ran declaring he “Hadn’t lost any bear.” Ray and his gang were forced to the conclusion that they had “lost no niggers” and beat hasty retreat, and while he and his gang were on their return trip back to Greensburg the colored woman and her children were being carried away with all possible speed over and through the Underground Railroad to a place amid the hills of Franklin county, where they were secure and safe from Ray and his human blood hounds.

This man Ray, however, later on returned to Decatur county and caused a deal of trouble, excitement and expense to those connected with the Underground Railroad, as related later on in this article.

Made Escape in Funeral Procession.

A woman and two small children, one a nursing babe, were brought via the Underground Railroad from Rising Sun to the station at McCoy’s, thence to the station on the farm of Marshall Hamilton, where they were located by the slave hunters, but finally evaded capture and were taken to the station at Albert Ammerman’s, located on the now home farm of Samuel L. Jackson. At this time there was but one muddy narrow road leading through a dense woods to the home of Mr. Ammerman, and it being such an out-of-the-way-place, was considered to be one of the most

safe and secure stations on the road in which to hide the fugitives. But the sleuth-like slave hunters located this woman and her children, and were completing arrangements for her capture when the death of Mr. Ammerman suddenly and very unexpectedly occurred.

The slave hunters postponed the anticipated capture until after the funeral, and here is exactly where they “lost out,” for on the afternoon of and during Mr. Ammerman’s funeral, the woman and children were placed in a covered carriage the woman dressed and disguised as a man, and when the funeral procession started from the house the carriage containing the fugitives brought up the rear of the procession.

When the procession reached the Kingston cemetery and came to a halt, the carriage containing the fugitives never stopped, but was driven to the colored settlement east of Clarksburg, and the inmates placed in safety until darkness appeared, when they were “shipped” on through to Ohio, and finally to Canada.

Harriet Beecher Stow

Whose brother, the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, one time pastor of a Lawrenceburg church, gained the intricate knowledge of the methods of the friends of the slave she displays in “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” through her association with some of the most zealous supporters and actors in and of the Underground Railroad. Her own house on Walnut Hills, Cincinnati, was a refuge where persons whose types are portrayed in George and Eliza, the boy Jim and his mother, were guided by her husband and brother a portion of the way toward Canada. In fact, her home early became a station where a number of women and children, conducted through and over the Underground Railroad from Kingston to Ohio, were given food, shelter and protected.

Chapter V

The Underground Railroad – Its Branches

Southward from Kingston it appeared to have several branches, one of which crossed the Ohio river near Madison and two others higher up – one near Vevay and the other near Rising Sun; the first runner near New Marion, in Ripley county and Zenas, in Jennings county, and the two latter past Milan, Ripley county – the three making a terminal of junction at a point somewhere near and south of McCoy’s Station in this county. From there the route was almost direct back to Kingston, thence to Clarksburg, bearing toward a colored settlement along the line of this and Franklin counties, a few miles northeast of Clarksburg, thence northeastward through Fayette and Wayne to Delaware county, or to Dark county, Ohio, and thence to Canada.

Fugitives, on crossing the Ohio River, were met by the conductory – sometimes by one of their own color by the name of William Thopson, hailing from Kingston, but oftener by white men, who would take them to the station near McCoy’s, making a night’s run of the trip, where they lay over for the day – they were all provided with “stop-over tickets” – and the next night the same process was repeated until their destination was reached.

As above intimated, the Underground Railroad was a close corporation and kept its business to itself so far as possible; but it had a competing line – the slave catchers – that gave it

much trouble and annoyance, and sometimes, but not very frequently, succeeded in getting its “freight” away from it.

Just how many fugitives this Underground Railroad succeeded in getting through to the land of freedom at the North can never be told, as no records of the number were kept along at the time, but the number is estimated at well up into the hundreds.

The passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850 so outraged the popular sentiment of the North that slave-catching became not only unpopular, but in many localities, dangerous, and those of our citizens who had previously engaged in the business gave it up, thus leaving the way of the fugitive to freedom freer from the danger of re-capture than it was before the passage of that law.

Anit-Slavery Sentiments

It was in December, 1830, that “The Decatur County Colonization Society,” an auxiliary to the National Colonization Society, was organized, and it was at the home of Luther Donnell; the purpose of which was to remove free persons of color, and such slaves as should be manumitted by their masters, to the colony of Liberia.

It was not long ere a strong opposition, however, began to develop to this scheme. The more radical of the anti-slavery men saw, or thought they saw, that the Colonization Society was being used in the interests of slavery, rather than of freedom; that the South regarded its free colored population as a continuous threat against the safety of their human property, and was employing that society as an agency for removing from among them what they regarded as a dangerous element rather than as a means to ultimate emancipation.

Decatur County Anti-Slavery Society

Under this view of the question, about the year 1836, the more radical of the anti-slavery men, mostly residing in Fugit township, withdrew their connection with the colonization of the Decatur County Anti-Slavery Society.

Among the leaders in this movement were: Luther A. Donnell, Cyrus Hamilton, Alexander McCoy, Samuel A. Donnell, John C. McCoy, Thomas Hamilton, James McCoy, Andrew Robison, Campbell McCoy, Samuel Donnell and Angus C. McCoy, of the Kingston neighborhood, and the Logans, Andersons, Rankins, and others of the Springhill neighborhood.

The anti-slavery creed was, in short, that slavery was a sin – a sin for which the whole Nation was responsible, and for which there was but one cure – immediate emancipation.

The consequence of this organization was a bitter and unrelenting fight between the supporters of the two societies, the creating of bickerings of neighbors, friends, and even relatives, and finally, schisms in their churches.

Without discussing the right or the wrong of either side, it is enough to here state that abolitionism grew, notwithstanding the persecution and ostracism its adherents had to undergo, and that it finally say its desire accomplished.

It was not the object of the members of the Decatur County Anti-Slavery Society at first to make of their organization a political party, but after years of experience with and trusting to the promises of the Whig and Democratic leaders of that day – all of which promises seem to

have been made but to be broken – the Abolitionists, most of whom, in this county, had been Whigs, cut loose from their old party associations and went into the new one known as the Liberty party.

This party placed its first county ticket in the field in 1842, at which time it polled an average of about eighty votes.

From this time until 1852, a perfect organization, especially in the years of Presidential elections, was kept up, polling from one hundred twenty to one hundred fifty votes.

The repeal of the Missouri Compromise, in 1854, again brought into harmony anti-slavery men of all shades, and in 1856, the Liberty party was firmly consolidated with the Republican party.

The result is known to all the world. A defeat that year followed by its triumph in 1860; then the war, the Emancipation Proclamation and then peace and a restored Union.

Many of the fathers of the anti-slavery cause in this county – Squire Donnell, Andy Robison and others – died before seeing the end of the “great iniquity,” but most of them lived to see the full fruition of their labors – man made free and the Nation redeemed from the “curse of bondage.”

Chapter VI

In Interesting, Truthful Story of a Slave Rescue Case

Though this most wonderful, interesting and celebrated drama was enacted and actually took place right here in Decatur county sixty-five years ago, the NEWS is the first newspaper to give it publication and publicity.

To convince our great army of readers that this report of the case is not exaggerated or in the leastwise “colored,” but that it is absolutely true to the paragraph and very word, we here introduce the statements of one who was not only an eye-witness and an actor but one of the principals in the scene, and his name is none other than that of William M. Hamilton.

The notes were prepared and the article written by him several years since, at the special request of the Donnells, Hamiltons and others (who were participants in operating the Underground Railroad), that something more and better might exist or be preserved than simply a tradition, to which the circumstances would, in a few generations, degenerate, unless recorded by unquestionable authority.

Through the kindness and information of a friend of the NEWS (persons and relatives of the men who took an active part in operating the famous Underground Railroad) the writer has been enabled to trace the written pages of Mr. Hamilton until he at last succeeded in locating the original manuscript which had its hiding place in a great fire and burglar proof safe, located SOMEWHERE within the borders of Decatur county, and that is as near as we are at liberty to publicly locate its place of “rest” and concealment; and here and now follows the account in Mr. Hamilton’s own and exact words concerning

THE ESCAPE, CAPTURE, RESCUE AND FINAL ESCAPE TO CANADA.

“I will try to relate in detail the history of the escape, capture, rescue and final escape to Canada of a colored woman and four children, claimed as the property of George Ray, of Kentucky, in which Mr. Luther A. Donnell and myself became involved in litigation before both the State and Federal Courts.

“In the fall of 1848, probably in October, Caroline and her children (four in number) made their way across the Ohio River, near the city of Madison, Indiana, when she was assisted on her way to Decatur county by a man named Waggoner who was frequently engaged in conducting fugitives from the river to this point.

“At what is now McCoy’s Station, Waggoner delivered them to Douglas McCoy, probably about two or three o’clock in the morning, who mounted them upon horses and started for a colored settlement near Clarksburg, and not far from the home of Luther A. Donnell.

“On his way to the colored settlement McCoy and his party came by way of my father’s (Cyrus Hamilton) and asked me to accompany and assist him on to the colored neighborhood.

“When we came within one and one-half miles of Clarksburg, we found we could not make the desired goal before daylight, so we stopped at the home of a colored man named Pernell, who lived near. McCoy then returned home; Pernell was uneasy and seemed afraid to keep the fugitives, so I rode over to Mr. Donnell’s, awakened him, and told him “what was up,” and that Pernell was afraid to keep the people.

“Donnell said he would go over to the colored settlement and have them come over and get the woman and children, whereupon I started back home, but soon met Pernell with the fugitives mounted on horses. It was then daylight and he hurried on to the house of a colored woman whose name was Jane Speed, and who lived where George Marlow now lives.

“The woman and children were secreted in an old house that had some hay in it; this old house was situated on a remote portion of her (Jane Speed’s) place, and not far from where Woodson Clark lived.

“This man Clark was reputed to be a slave-catcher and hunter, and was ever ready to obstruct the pathway of those who were seeking their freedom.

Hiding Place Detected – Woman Betrayed

“During the day Clark saw Jane Speed’s boy come away from the old house, whither he had been to convey food to the fugitives; this was enough to prompt an investigation of the contents of the old hut by Clark, who took in the situation at a glance, and told the woman she was in a very unsafe position, and that he would conduct her to the colored settlement, etc., but instead of doing so he took them to his own house.

“This colored woman suspecting that all was not right, asked him (Clark) where the colored people were to whom he had promised to guide her; it was then late in the evening and he, suspecting that her friends would miss her and her children from their place of concealment, and that he would be suspected, resolved to secret them in an old fodder house on the farm of his son, and near a stable yard, at the same time telling the woman that he would send the colored people to carry her away.

Chapter VII

Starts Out In Quest of Friends – Gets Lost

“After several hours waiting in the fodder-house the woman concluded that she had been betrayed, and knowing that there was a colored settlement in the neighborhood, left her children in the fodder house and started out in quest of friends. The night was dark, and she a stranger to the fields, soon lost her way and wandered.

“Leaving the woman and children for a time, the reader’s attention is called to what was being done by their friends.

Tracked to Clark’s Yard Gate.

“As soon as the fugitives were missed from the hut on Jane Speed’s place (otherwise called the Peyton place), the colored people tracked them to Clark’s yard-gate; secure assistance enough to watch Clark’s premises, so as to prevent the escape of the people, etc.

“Mr. Donnell then held an interview with my father and they determined to apply for a

WRIT OF HABEAS CORPUS,

And, by legal inquiry, learn by what authority the fugitives were detained by Clark.

“By this time the darkness of night was setting in, when my father and Mr. Donnell applied to John Hopkins, then Associate Judge of Decatur county, for the required writ, which was granted, but it was found necessary to go to Greensburg to obtain the seal of the court, and the attendance of the court, and the attendance of the sheriff to serve the writ. The sheriff was Michael Swope, lately deceased, who sent the writ to a deputy named John Imlay, then living in Clarksburg, with orders to serve it.

Armed With Corn Knives, Clubs, Etc.

“When my father and Mr. Donnell started for Greensburg I was detailed to look after the party who were watching Clark’s premises. I found about twenty colored men assembled; they were very much excited and were armed with corn knives, clubs, and maybe more deadly weapons. It was with difficulty that I restrained them from making a forced search.

“At last the deputy sheriff came, and with him Robert A. Hamilton, to assist in the execution of the writ. It had been arranged to have the colored men rush, in a body, on to the sheriff’s party, and take the fugitives by force, as soon as they should be brought out of Clark’s house, but the search was fruitless, and we were all “chop-fallen,” as it looked as though we had been outgeneraled.

“Mr. Clark was greatly offended, and said he would ‘see some one through with this business.’ He went to Clarksburg and tried to get a writ from a Justice of the Peace, by which he could take the slaves to Kentucky, but, of course, failed to get one.

“Mr. Donnell, R. A. Hamilton, myself and the colored people then held a council and decided to extend the search to the premises of the two sons of Mr. Clark, who lived, one on the north and the other on the south side of the Clark farm.

Woman Rescued – Children Lost

“Meantime, Mr. Donnell and myself went to Mr. Donnell’s house to await developments; a short time before daylight one squad came and reported that they had found the woman near

the premises of one of the Clark's. She was rambling about the fields in a state of bewilderment, and did not know where her children were. She told the story of her removal from the hut and subsequent concealment in Clark's fodder-house, etc.

"Of course, the colored men soon found the children, and the party was once more intact and with friends. The colored men took the fugitives down into their neighborhood and secreted them in a deep ravine on the Bull Fork of Salt Creek, in Franklin county, intending to start them on their way the next night; we were greatly rejoiced at the turn things had taken, yet we felt assured that the slave catchers would press hard after their game, having once had it in their possession.

Slave-Hunters From Greensburg in Dangerous Business.

"R. A. Hamilton returned home as soon as the search was over. After remaining at Mr. Donnell's until the colored men had reported, I started for home, and on my way there I met four or five men whom I know to be slave-hunters. Some were from Greensburg, and one a stranger; who, as I afterward learned, was a man named Ray, from Kentucky, who owned the slaves.

"A son of Clark's and one Hobbs had been to Greensburg for a writ to enable them to secure possession of the fugitives, and had given the alarm; all this while the woman and children were being found, and while I was at Mr. Donnell's, as before related.

"I hurried home, changed horses and kept a watch over the movements of the slave-hunters; they went through Clarksburg and I went to Mr. Donnell's and reported what I had seen. He proposed that we mount our horses and skirmish around the Clark premises and the colored settlement, and observe what might transpire.

"We went to a horse-mill in the edge of the colored settlement; there we remained some time, but learned nothing more than there was quite a party at Clark's house.

"In the afternoon the slave-hunters made some demonstrations in and about the settlement, and did attempt to search one or two houses, but, finding it an unsafe business, they abandoned the expedition.

Chapter VIII

Woman Almost Helpless – Encumbered with Children

"The colored people were naturally very much excited and determined. The woman was almost helpless, encumbered as she was with her little children, the youngest of which was a nursing babe. They could not be moved around easily like men or adults.

"Now, there was a colored man and his wife who had recently moved from Union county to the settlement, and they had two children who were about the age of two of the fugitive children. This couple were in the habit of traveling to and from their former home with their children. Accordingly, they made a bold daylight trip with the slave-woman's children instead of their own children, arrived safely at the house of William Beard, an Underground Railroad man and a goodly Quaker who lived beyond immediate reach of the pursuers.

Planning Successful Evasion of the Pursuers

“But the woman and two children were yet to be disposed of, and about sunset word came that the hunters had discovered the whereabouts of the remaining fugitives, and again we were disconsolate; we reasoned that they would bring her to Clark’s for safe-keeping over night, and we resolved to try our writ again and see if that would not give us the possession of the fugitives.

“Meantime, we had assembled at Mr. Donnell’s house for supper; while we were thus mourning over our ill luck; a colored man came and announced that matters were all right – that the man who was on guard had mistaken a party of men who were returning from a “raising” for the slave hunting party, but that they had passed by without observing the woman or her hiding place.

“Again our drooping spirits revived and we set ourselves to the task of planning the successful evasion of the pursuers. The route over which the Underground passengers were unusually conveyed was through Laurel and Blooming Grove, in Franklin county, crossing the East Fork of White Water at Fairfield, and thence on to William Beard’s in Union county.

“This line had been discovered by the enemy and was well watched, besides the excitement was running high and spreading wide, while our party were more determined than ever.

White Men Take Matter In Hand – Let It Cost What It Might

“Heretofore we had depended upon the colored people to do the work, while we made the calculations, but Mr. Donnell’s determination was now fairly aroused, and he proposed to me that we take this matter in hands and see the slaves safe through, let it cost what it might.
Colored Woman Disguised in Male Attire.

“Accordingly, we instructed the colored people to disguise the woman in male attire, and for three or four of them to accompany her, mounted, and others on foot, to the Peyton corner, where we would meet them. They executed the details promptly and were on hand in time.

A Dangerous Place to Enter

“We found it necessary to press thorough Clarksburg to reach the point we had in mind; it was a dangerous place to enter, as there were plenty of watchful slave-hunters there, so we instructed her to ride to the middle of the road, flanked by a trusty colored man on either side.

“We had the children taken around the village (Clarksburg) to a point about a mile beyond the town; the exit was easily made and the point reached; we then dismissed the colored people and resolved to keep our own council.

“The woman was mounted on the horse with one of us, and the children with the other, and in this manner, we rode through Springhill and to the house of Thomas Donnell situated about one mile west of that village. Day was breaking and Luther A. Donnell awakened by his brother, Thomas, who assisted him to hide the slaves in an out-of-the-way-building, while I took charge of the horses.

Refugees Were Fed By Two Children

“During the next day the refugees were fed by two children of the Donnell family – one, Jane, has since gone to her final reward; the other is L. L. Donnell, of Springhill, since deceased.

Slaves Leave Donnell Home in Closed Carriage

“Luther A. Donnell and myself returned to our homes with the understanding that we were to meet at the house of John R. Donnell, near the home of Thomas Donnell, that night at ten o’clock, for the purpose of making final disposition of the fugitives.

“At this juncture we pressed Lowry Donnell and John R. Donnell into service. The latter entered into the arrangements with a hearty good will by bringing out his carriage, a fine one, with close top and side curtains, and assisting in the preparations.

Provided with Clothing And Doubled Veil

“The woman and children had been provided with plenty of warm woolen clothing, and, being double veiled, were placed in the carriage and started on their way to freedom.

“The party was composed of Luther A. Donnell, myself, John R. Donnell, Lowry Donnell, Robert Stout and Nathaniel Thomson; the last two only went as far as New Salem, in Rush County.”

Mother and Children Re-United—Reach Canada

Mr. Hamilton continues the details of the journey, the substance of which is that, after a drive of twenty-four hours, with only a short rest to feed the horses, the party arrived at William Beard’s, in Union county, and were kindly welcomed.

Chapter IX

Return Home, Horses and Men Worn Out, Carriage Springs Demolished, Etc.

The rescuers returned the next day with horses and men worn and fatigued, carriage springs broken and the experience of one of the most interesting incidents of the old “Antebellum” age, when freedom and slavery were struggling together for the mastery of our country, and we all thank Almighty God that it was His will that freedom should and did win the great and mighty struggle.

Woman Writes Letter Expressing Gratitude

The woman found her other two children at the next station in Ohio, reached Canada in due time and, in after years, wrote to Mr. Donnell expressing her gratitude and great thankfulness for his assistance.

Luther A. Donnell Indicted

Without doubt the most interesting and exciting trial ever held in Decatur county—certainly the one that attracted the most general attention at home and abroad – was one that grew out of the transaction referred to in the above article. Luther A. Donnell was indicated by a Decatur county grand jury for “aiding and abetting the escape of fugitives from labor, etc.”

Having lost their chattels and been defeated in their attempts to recover them the slave owner and his sympathizers resolved to take the advantage offered by a State statute then supposed to be in force in Indiana. Accordingly, a few days later a grand jury of Decatur county indicted Luther A. Donnell, charging his with “aiding and abetting the escape of fugitives from labor, etc.”

The case came up for trial at the March term of the court in 1849. Hon. George H. Dunn was presiding judge and John Hopkins and Samuel Ellis were Associate Justices, with the following named gentlemen composing the jury: William Magnus, Moses Rutherford, William McNabb, Henry S. Burke, Angus Forbes, Philip Ballard, L. F. B. Jocelyn, Benjamin Martin, Harvey Lathrop, James Mandlove, Eli Douglas and Daniel Misner.

The State was represented by John S. Scobey, prosecuting attorney, assisted by Andrew Davidson. The defense was conducted by John Ryman, of Lawrenceburg, Joseph Robinson and Philander Hamilton of Greensburg.

On the calling of the case the defense moved to quash the indictment on the grounds set forth in the case of Prigg vs. Pennsylvania, in which it was held that State legislation for the recovery of fugitives from labor in other States or for aiding in the escape of such was unconstitutional.

The motion was over-ruled and the trial proceeded. The evidence upon which the case seemed to turn was the positive statement of Richard Clark, (one of the sons mentioned,) who testified that the woman and children were placed in his fodder house about two o'clock in the afternoon of Monday, and that between three and four o'clock the next morning they were taken out by Luther A. Donnell and William M. Hamilton, which the reader will notice is widely at variance with the facts as stated in Mr. Hamilton's report and account.

In those days a man could not testify in his own behalf neither could a colored man testify in a case where a white man was interested.

There was conflicting testimony in this case; and the popular voice was seemingly unfavorable to the defense and the verdict was against the defendants.

Mr. Donnell appealed the case to the Supreme Court of Indiana, the result of which is here given in the words of the record:

Donnell vs. The State

Perkins, Judge.

Error to the Decatur Circuit Court.

"This was an indictment against Luther A. Donnell, containing two counts, one charging him with inducing the escape of, and the other with secreting a certain woman, of color, called Caroline, then being the slave of and owing service to George Ray, of Kentucky. The defendant was convicted. The section of the statute of our State upon which the indictment was grounded, according to the decision in Prigg vs. Pennsylvania, is unconstitutional and void. The conviction on it was therefore erroneous."

Brings Suit To Recover Value of Property – Obtains Judgment For Fifteen Hundred Dollars, Which, With Costs, Amounts to Three Thousand Dollars.

Encouraged by the advantages gained here in the criminal action, and by the popular clamor, Ray brought suit in the United States court at Indianapolis to recover the value of his property, and obtained a judgment for \$1,500 which with costs amounted to about \$3,000.

This was promptly paid by the defendant to the last dollar, and the whole amount was refunded to Mr. Donnell by the anti-slavery men of Indiana and Ohio, and they were aided by a

very great number of men who were not publicly known to be in sympathy with the anti-slave movement and with the Underground Railroad as well.

Thus ended one of the most exciting legal contests ever held in this part of the State of Indiana. The effect on the popular mind was decidedly unfavorable to the slave-catching interest here and caused many who had before been indifferent toward the anti-slavery agitators(?) to take a decided stand for or against that issue.

From Lawrenceburg to Greensburg Secluded in a Load of Wood.

The NEWS is not only in receipt of an interesting letter from Mrs. Eusebia Cravens Stimson, of St. Petersburg, Florida, but one that adds an additional and highly entertaining chapter to our Underground Railroad story, and for which the editor of the NEWS bows his acknowledgement of thanks and appreciation to Mrs. Stimson.

Mrs. Stimson is the daughter of our former well known and highly esteemed resident, Mr. Herman Cravens, now deceased, whose home was just one mile southeast of Greensburg, on the Michigan road.

Her letter is written under date of January 2, 1914, at St. Petersburg, Florida, and is as follows:

Dear Mr. Caskey: --

I am glad you are putting in permanent form some of the history of the Underground Railroad. The men (all save two) who worked on that railroad have gone to their reward, and long since been forgiven the "sneers" of their neighbors who called them "nigger harborers."

Chapter X

Her Home A Station

Our old home, one mile southeast of Greensburg, on the Michigan road, was among the Underground Railroad stations, and from the Ohio river to that home or station, many a black man and woman have been brought at different times, and always after the great mantle of darkness had spread her wings o'er Mother Earth.

My father, ever ready to respond to the plea for aid upon the part of the fleeing slaves, would get up from his bed, hitch his team of swift black horses to a covered wagon, conceal the fleeing souls in search of freedom therein, and carry them rapidly still farther northward and to another Underground Railroad station, where they would be placed in the hands of friends, and later on transferred to still other stations along the Underground Railroad until they reached Ohio, and thence on to Canada, their final point of destination and the land of the free.

Hides Big, Black "Mammy"

In our home was one room that was always closed (on certain occasions) and that was the "spare room," and in that room, for hours one day, was secluded a big, black "mamma" whose Mistress was visiting relatives and friends in Lawrenceburg, and who became short of finances, and proposed to take this poor colored "mamma" just across the river and sell her, that she might thereby add a cash sum to her almost depleted exchequer, and not only have money to return home with, but enough to further enable her to prolong her visit and have a good time.

But, alas and alack! The cruel Mistress was foiled in her financial scheme and outwitted by the black “mamma” and her friends. Her plans and well defined scheme to sell the colored woman were overheard, and the result, by quick and secret action upon the part of Underground Railroad operators, was that “mamma” came to our home, near Greensburg in a load of wool which a kind man and his wife brought to the woolen mill (?).

After the “mamma” had been carefully concealed in our “spare room,” and all was quiet and seemed safe, I, with that great curiosity that over possesses childhood, secretly and quietly peeped into the room, and there beheld the old turbaned head of the black “mamma” swaying to and fro while her arms were being slowly lifted up and down, seemingly in great despair.

Somehow, someway, ere long and between two days, this old sad-faced “mamma” was on her way to freedom – traveling on a through ticket via the Great Underground Railroad. And she reached her destination.

Chained to Top of Stage Coach

During the days of the Underground Railroad, an old stage coach was driven past our house and on top of it were black men in chains, who were being returned to slavery, they having made an unsuccessful attempt to make their escape. I saw, with my own eyes, the chained forms of these black human beings, and certainly my feelings can much better be imagined than described here.

Threatened With Fire and Death

One day a Kentucky slave owner was driving hogs to Indianapolis, and just after passing our home he missed his best “darkey.” Soon he returned to the (our) house of the “d---d abolitionist,” full of wrath and in search of his missing slave. But, for once, our house was not a harbor, though it was searched just the same, threatened with fire and its owner with horrible death.

Hid In Sandcreek Church

The architect of the old Sandcreek church, which stood near by, perhaps never thought of giving a hiding place to fugitive slaves when he placed the building on pillars above the ground, but this “darkey” actually found a safe retreat therein, and though hotly pursued, later on made his escape to a better hiding place, while his master went to Greensburg to secure the assistance of officers.

We pause to remark: Neither the alleged Kentucky slave owner nor the officers caught sight of this fleeing “darkey” as he not only made splendid connection but good time on a “through train” on the Underground Railroad and made good his escape.

Oh, the dauntless courage displayed by the brave men and women who harbored and cared for the black human strangers in search of their freedom. Generously and cheerfully did they harbor, feed, clothe, protect and assist to freedom and safety the worthy and unworthy alike, and, as you say, Mr. Editor, soon all who have any personal recollection or knowledge of this dark spot in the history of our country, will have crossed the dark river where rose-tinted clouds fold like angel wings around the horizon of eternity.

With very best wishes to all Decatur county friends, I remain

Very truly, Eusebia Cravens Stimson

Chapter XI

A Contribution Relating Exciting Experience with “Nigger Hunters” Near Westport

Our good friend and patron, “Uncle Zack” Boicourt, of Westport, contributes the following exceedingly interesting and truthful chapter to our Underground Railroad history, for which the editor of the NEWS extends his thanks and grateful appreciation.

“Uncle Zack” writes from Westport under date of February 7, 1914, and speaks of his own personal knowledge and observation concerning the Underground Railroad, its operators, benefactors and participants:

Old Station Still Standing

My dear Mr. Caskey: -- It is not only my great privilege but I deem it my duty to contribute to your exceedingly interesting Underground Railroad history the following facts:

Just eight miles east of Westport, in the Decatur edge of Ripley county, and on the banks of the classic waters of Flat Rock, stands an old log cabin with an interesting history, and, could that cabin talk, it could and would reveal some mighty entertaining and highly sensational information pertaining to the Underground Railroad, its operators, benefactors and combatants, as it was during the “fifties” one of the original and recognized Underground Railroad stations having direct connections with lines and stations at McCoy, Kingston, Springhill, and other points in Decatur and Franklin counties.

This old log “station” is not only still standing, but it is in a good state of preservation, and today is occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Everett Hull as their home. It was erected by the parents of Mr. Hull, the present occupant and owner, and was built in our early pioneer days. The senior Mr. and Mrs. Hull are still living, and have past their eightieth mile stone in life’s journey.

I not only speak intelligently, but knowingly, when I say this old log cabin, now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hull, was a one-time Underground Railroad station, for the very good reason that I have visited in the cabin many times, and I am personally and intimately acquainted with its present and former owners, and, therefore, know whereof I speak when I say it has given shelter and protection to many a fugitive slave – men, women, and children.

Transferred to Kingston.

From this station many a fleeing slave, in his or her desperate and exciting chase for freedom, has been transferred to the old Meadows home or station, known as the Kingston station.

Had Its Secret Or Trap Door

This cabin was not then, nor is it now, different from other former typical pioneer log cabins, save in one respect and that is its cunningly connived secret trap or cellar door.

From all outside appearances and indications this old cabin had no cellar attachment, but it really deceived its looks, for underneath its puncheon floor was a cellar some six or eight feet square. The only entrance or exit to and from this cellar was by and through a secret trap door in the inside and in one corner of the room, and in this cellar was the secret recess for hiding the fugitive slaves from capture by their masters or hired “runaway nigger” hunters.

Slaves Hidden In the Cellar

One night a couple of slaves crossed the Ohio River from the Kentucky side and landed on the Indiana shores, where they were taken in charge by an Underground Railroad operator or conductor; brought to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hull; fed and concealed in the cellar above referred to.

The following day Mrs. Hull was at home and busily engaged in operating first her spinning wheel and then her loom, spinning and weaving linen goods for domestic use.

All of a sudden a loud “hello” was heard, and Mrs. Hull, on going to the door, discovered a half-dozen “nigger” hunters in front of her cabin, equipped with horses. Savage Bloodhounds, Fire Arms and Black Snack Whips, and straightway did these “nigger” hunters enter her home with their dogs, fire-arms and whips, and demand to know of her whether or not she and her husband were harboring any “darkies” in the house or on the premises?

Mrs. Hull replied: “If we were to tell you there were no darkies here, you would not believe us; so you have the privilege of searching the house and outbuildings.”

While the “nigger” hunters were searching the house and looking up through the loft, Mrs. Hull, who had an old strip of carpet over the trap door and her spinning wheel on top of the carpet, got very busy with her spinning and let them search to their heart’s content.

Not finding the fugitives after a most diligent search in every place inside and outside the house – except the cellar – the “nigger” hunters departed, heaping “cuss words” upon the head of Mrs. Hull, and telling her what would be the consequence if they ever found darkies in her possession or in concealment about her home.

Slaves Make Their Escape

That very night (after the “nigger hunters had been there) the Underground Railroad operators “got busy.” They loaded the slaves into a farm wagon. On this particular wagon was a large box bed containing a partition, separating the bed in two sections. In one of the sections was placed the slaves, under cover, while in the other was a couple of hogs. If these old (supposed to be) farmers were ever overtaken by the “nigger” hunters, they would pass them by, thinking they was going to market with their hogs.

The “old farmer” drove his team to a station near McCoy’s that night, where he transferred his “freight” to another branch of the Underground Railroad, running direct to the Miles Meadow station, just north of Kingston. Here the slaves were hidden in a straw stack, fed and cared for until the next night, when they were sent to Franklin county via the Underground Railroad, thence to Ohio and on to Canada.

Scores of similar incidents are related by the Hulls, but let this one suffice for the present.

Chapter XII

Talk With An Ex-Slave, Who Was Trailed By Blood-Hounds, Bitten And Terribly Whipped

During my visit in the South I had a talk with an old colored gentleman who was an ex-slave, and his story of the outrages perpetrated upon him the cruel-wrongs, sufferings and heart

aches he endured while in bondage, so interested me that I give it in connection with the above facts, believing it will be read with interest by others:

To the query, “were you ever a slave?” he replied: “Yes, sir; I was a slave, and have not only seen but have experienced slavery in all its bitterness and brutality. When I was a boy but eighteen years of age, I attempted to make my escape from the slave owners cruel and inhuman lash by running away to Canada and becoming a free human being. My master was so mean to me I could no longer stay with him.

I started out alone, traveling by night and hiding and sleeping through the day; I traveled through the woods, thickets, briar patches and swamps, and was making good time and rapidly leaving the old Kentucky plantation behind me when I heard the howling of bloodhounds and knew my overseer was giving me a chase with his vicious man-eating dogs. I lost no time in climbing a small tree, and no sooner was I out of their reach when they came up to the tree barking, jumping up after me, snapping their teeth and in various other ways notifying my old overseer that they had me up a tree.

“Soon the overseer rode up; quieted the vicious hounds, and jerking a great big revolver from a holster that surrounded his waist, said to me:

“Nigger, if you don’t crawl down and out from that tree, I’ll be g----d---- if I don’t shoot and kill you.”

“I got down, but had hardly touched the ground until the blood hounds pounced upon me, sinking their great teeth into the flesh of my arms and legs.

“The overseer took the dogs off of me, put me astride his horse behind him; took me back to the old Kentucky plantation and gave me forty or fifty lashes across my naked back with a large blacksnake whip, causing the blood to flow down at my feet in pools. My limbs, arms and back were very sore for weeks.

“Yes, sir; I was a slave and saw and tasted its bitterness.

“I never expect to see my master and overseer again—they are both dead. I am trying to make Heaven my home, and I don’t think they will be there.”

Now Mr. Caskey, realizing that the cruel days of slavery have long since come to an end, and with a heart filled with gratitude to God for a free country and a free people, I bid you and your readers a kind adieu.

Zack Boicourt

Underground Railroad Still in Operation

After the Donnell-Hamilton episode no other efforts were made to recover escaped slaves in Decatur county, although from then until the outbreak of the war, the Underground Railroad was in full operation.

It is a known fact that not one slave in a thousand was ever recovered by the owners during the last ten years of the existence of the Underground Railroad system.

The President of the Underground Railroad

Levi Coffin, who resided in Wayne County, Indiana, was the recognized President of the combined Underground Railroads of this country. He resided in Wayne county from 1826 to

1847, when he removed to Cincinnati for the purpose of opening a store where goods produced by free labor alone should be sold. His relations with the Underground Railroad were maintained, and the genial but fearless Quaker came to be generally known by the fictitious but happy title, "President of the Underground railroad." It has been said by Mr. Coffin that "for thirty-three years he received into his house more than one hundred slaves every year."

When the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution was celebrated in Cincinnati by colored citizens and their friends, among whom were two from the Kingston neighborhood, Mr. Coffin was one of those called upon by the chairman to address the great meeting. In response, the veteran station-keeper explained how he had obtained the title of President of the Underground Railroad. He said, "The title was given to me by slave-hunters, who could not find their fugitive slaves after they got into my hands. I accepted the office thus conferred upon me and endeavored to perform my duty faithfully. Government has now taken the work out of our hands. The stock of the Underground Railroad has gone down in the market, the business is spoiled. The road is now of no further use." He then, amid much applause, resigned his office, and declared the operations of the Underground Railroad at an end.

Othaniel Reed, a friend and patron of the NEWS residing on North Carver street, this city, contributes an interesting chapter to our Underground Railroad history – one the editor appreciates and is glad to publish. There may be many others like Mr. Reed, and doubtless are, whom the NEWS knows nothing concerning the part they or their relatives played in the operation of the Underground Railroad, and if such is the case, let them notify us at once, as it is the least of our thoughts to slight or neglect any one who took part in making this most interesting history.

Mr. Reed writes from his home in this city under date of February 11, 1914, as follows: Editor News: -- Being a constant reader of your valuable paper I, of course, have been reading in its columns "Decatur County's Part in the Historic Underground Railroad of Slavery Days," and have read it with no small degree of interest, and desire to contribute my "mite" thereto.

I was but a small "chap" during the dark and dismal period covering the existence and operations of that most wonderful rail road, but my memory is clear and recollections fresh as to its origin and its objects.

His Father An Active Participant.

My father, Othaniel Reed, was one of the operators of the Decatur County Underground Railroad and its connecting lines, and took as much interest, performed as much hard work, assumed as great risks and braved as many dangers in piloting the fugitive slaves from the Ohio River and along the Underground Railroad to places of safety and freedom as did any other one of its operators mentioned in the historical article.

His Home A Place of Council

Well do I remember, though but a small boy at the time, of seeing Luther Donnell, Cyrus Hamilton, Andrew Robison, and a number of others coming and being at my father's home at different times, where they would hold council and advise each other concerning fugitive slaves, the Underground Railroad, its operators, etc.

I also remember then on the same night of their meeting, or on the following night, my father would hitch up his team, drive away from home, and be absent for several days.

Attempted Assassination

On one occasion, and on his return home from a trip, my father told my mother that Wright Ray had fired a shot at him while he was driving along the Underground Railroad near Rising Sun, and it was a very close call, indeed, for the dastardly would-be assassin came so near accomplishing his aim as to burn one side of my father's face with powder from his deadly weapon.

Yes, my father was always on hand and ever ready to take an active part or to aid by devising ways and means by which to aid the fugitives in their efforts to gain freedom.

He must have been a "section hand" on this famous Underground Railroad, but be that as it may, he is not here now to relate the part he took in aiding the fugitives, in operating the road, the trials and hardships he underwent along with his co-workers.

Father and Six Sons Fight For The Cause of Freedom

In 1861, my father was "promoted" from "section hand" on the famous Underground Railroad to "high private" in Company G, Forty-seventh Indiana Infantry, and lost his life in fighting to uphold and sustain the same principles that he advocated and labored for during his service on that dangerous and adventurous Underground Railroad.

Will say, by way of information, that my father, five brothers and myself resorted to the surest method of freeing the negroes, and that was the point of the bayonet. It may be that some of the numbers of the Underground Railroad did likewise – I don't know.

Very truly,

Othaniel Reed