



The Underground Railroad in Lincoln's Neighborhood

The Underground Railroad refers to the efforts of enslaved African Americans to gain their freedom by escaping bondage. Wherever slavery existed, there were efforts to escape. Acts of self-emancipation made runaways "fugitives" according to the laws of the times. While most began and completed their journeys unassisted, each subsequent decade in which slavery was legal in the United States saw an increase in active efforts to assist escape. Abraham Lincoln's neighbor, Jameson Jenkins, played an important role in the hopes of freedom seekers passing through Springfield, Illinois from Illinois' bordering slave states of Kentucky and Missouri, and beyond.

Jameson Jenkins travels from North Carolina



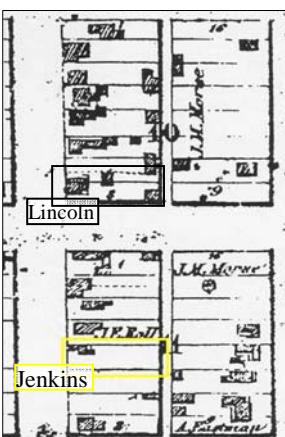
Above, Underground Railroad routes; Right, Sangamon County Courthouse where Jenkins filed his freedom papers.

Jameson Jenkins was born in North Carolina sometime around 1810. It is unclear whether he was born into slavery or free, but he was documented as being a free man by 1835. Within ten years, he had left his home state making the potentially risky trek through slave states to reach the free state of Indiana, where he married Elizabeth Pelham. In 1844, they had a daughter, Nancy. The family then traveled on to Illinois, where,

presumably upon his arrival in Springfield, Jenkins filed his Certificate of Freedom papers with the Sangamon County Recorder of Deeds, on March 28, 1846.

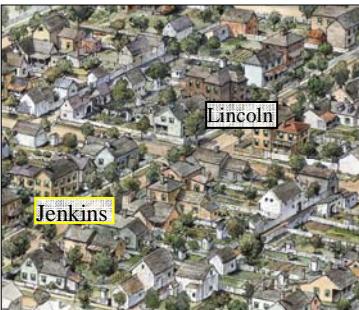


Jenkins' Life in Springfield



Above, 1858 map of Springfield showing footprint of Jenkins and Lincoln houses; Above Right, modern artist's interpretation Lincoln's 1860 neighborhood, showing Jenkins and Lincoln homes; Far Right, photograph of Lincoln home neighborhood today with Jenkins' wagon exhibit in foreground and Lincoln home in distance.

Two years later, Jenkins and his family purchased a home in Springfield on the east side of Eighth Street, between



Jackson and Edwards, located five lots south of Abraham Lincoln's home. The Jenkins home was constructed in the late 1840's, at about the time that the property was owned by Martha Ann Pelham Blanks and James Blanks. Martha Ann was a sister to Jameson's wife, Elizabeth. On February 18, 1848, the Jenkins family purchased the home from the Blanks family. The small two story house sat at the northwest corner of the lot. It had an irregular shape, appearing as if another single story structure was attached.

Jenkins was an enterprising, comparatively successful businessman. A

drayman, or teamster by occupation, he transported goods and sometimes people. He owned fifty percent more property than the average black citizen in Springfield at that time, suggesting that he owned and operated his dray or wagon. The occupation of drayman was a perfect job for someone who was also a conductor on the Underground Railroad.

The Jenkins and Lincoln families contributed to this racially mixed middle class neighborhood that itself represented Lincoln's dream of self determination—the ability of an individual to rise economically and socially by his or her own effort and labor, without the shackles of slavery depriving them of the basic human rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.



"Slave Stampede"

Eleven run away slaves, belonging to citizens of St. Louis, and for which a reward of \$300 each, was offered, were captured in this county yesterday, by individuals of this city.

We have received a communication in relation to the late "slave stampede" in our neighborhood, of this tenor:

Rumor may have it, that it was a colored person who betrayed the runaways last week. But unfortunately the one they accuse of having done so, started north with a part of the same gang the night before the capture. And this rumor was only to prevent, and may be save the "under-ground car" from being upset or overtaken. "Justice."

Newspaper accounts of the 1850, runaway slave incident; Top, Illinois State Register, Jan. 17, 1850; Above, Illinois State Journal, Jan. 22, 1850; Right, Illinois State Journal, Jan. 23, 1850.

On January 17, 1850, Jenkins was involved in an incident that was reported in

the local newspaper as a "slave stampede." Jenkins is believed to have assisted a group of runaway slaves escape the hands of slave catchers, taking them north to Bloomington, Illinois. In the days following the incident, town newspapers reported various and contradictory stories regarding the runaway slaves and their capture,

some accounts suggesting that they were betrayed by Jenkins. A later account revealed that, rather than betraying the runaway slaves, Jenkins had indeed assisted them, explaining that the

contradictory stories were passed on deliberately so that the railroad car in which the freedom seekers and Jenkins had traveled on to Bloomington would

Messrs. Editors:—In your paper of the 22d inst., there is a communication signed "Justice" which refers to the slave stampede in this neighborhood on the 16th, saying "that it was rumored that a colored person had betrayed the slaves, but, unfortunately, the one they accuse of having done so, started north with a part of the same gang the night before the capture; and this rumor was only to prevent, and may be, to save the underground car from being upset or overtaken." Now, in order to correct public sentiment in regard to that man's conduct in this matter, I would refer them to the following certificate of the agent of the northern line of stages:

Springfield, Jan. 22, 1850.
This is to certify that Mr. Jenkins left for Bloomington on the 16th day of January, 1850, in the stage.

J. C. GOODHUE, agent.
A Friend to "Justice."

Preservation of the Jenkins Property

The Jenkins family sold their home in 1866 and, unfortunately, the house was removed sometime between 1896 and 1917. In 1971, President Richard M. Nixon signed legislation authorizing the acquisition of the four blocks surrounding the Lincoln home thereby creating Lincoln Home National Historic Site. The National Park Service acquired the Jenkins lot in January of 1978; ensuring that archeological resources related to the home of Jameson Jenkins

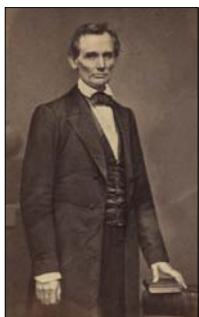
not be discovered. By his actions, Jenkins had risked his home, his livelihood, and his life to deliver freedom to those who had been enslaved.

are preserved. On Lincoln's birthday, February 12, 2008, the Jenkins lot was formally included into the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom and the National Park Service is continuing its efforts to tell the Jameson Jenkins and Underground Railroad stories.



Right, Photograph of the Jenkins lot and Springfield Diversity wagon exhibit at Lincoln Home National Historic Site.

A Legacy of Freedom



Photograph of Abraham Lincoln taken in 1860.

The relationship between America's sixteenth president and his neighbor Jameson Jenkins is interesting. On February 11, 1861, President-Elect Abraham Lincoln departed his beloved Springfield to travel to the White House. On the morning of his departure, Lincoln reportedly relied on his neighbor, Jameson Jenkins, to provide him with a ride to the Great Western Depot where

he delivered his famous Farewell Address to the citizens of Springfield. This event demonstrated a relationship between Lincoln and Jenkins and raises speculation that the man known as the "Great Emancipator" may have known a conductor on the Underground Railroad. Both men, in different ways, helped enslaved people achieve freedom.

National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom



The National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program coordinates preservation and education efforts nationwide and integrates local historical places, museums, and interpretive programs associated with the Underground Railroad into a mosaic of

community, regional, and national stories. The Network also serves to facilitate communication and between researchers and interested parties, and aid in the development of statewide organizations for preserving and researching Underground Railroad sites.

Learn More

For more information on Lincoln Home National Historic Site, visit www.nps.gov/liho or call 217-391-3221; to learn more about the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, visit www.nps.gov/ugrr.