

**THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD**

**IN**

**CONCORD**

**AND**

**AT**

**THE WAYSIDE**

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this resource guide is to provide information on the involvement of the Alcott Family in the underground railroad when the family lived at Hillside, their name for the Wayside. In order to accomplish that goal, it was necessary to include in this binder information on the history of the underground railroad in the nation and on the history of the underground railroad in Concord. To facilitate using the binder, it has been arranged into three major sections as described below. Each section can be used independently of the others but the fullest understanding of the underground railroad and of the Alcott's activities will be obtained by reading all of the sections.

### I. Underground Railroad

The information in this section is a copy of the historical research included in a Special Resource Study on the Underground Railroad completed by the National Park Service in September of 1995. It is meant to provide the reader with an overview of the history of the underground railroad. A comprehensive bibliography is included for further reading.

### II. Concord

This section will orientate the reader to the underground railroad activities in Concord. By including this information, the Alcott's assistance to fugitive slaves can be put into perspective. People who lived in the same community as the Alcotts were also helping fugitives. A bibliography for this section is included at the end of the binder.

### III. The Alcotts

This section mainly utilizes quotes from Bronson Alcott's Journals to show his attitude toward slavery and abolitionism. Information in brackets and italics have been added to clarify matters that he discusses. Both he and his wife write about their experiences assisting fugitive slaves at Hillside.

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**UNDERGROUND  
RAILROAD**



# HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

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## INTRODUCTION

The Underground Railroad was perhaps the most dramatic protest action against slavery in United States history. The operations of clandestine escape networks began in the 1500s, and was later connected with organized abolitionist activity of the 1800s. Neither an "underground" nor a "railroad," this informal system arose as a loosely constructed network of escape routes that originated in the South, intertwined throughout the North, and eventually ended in Canada. Escape routes were not just restricted to the North, but also extended into western territories, Mexico, and the Caribbean. From 1830 to 1865, the Underground Railroad reached its peak as abolitionists and sympathizers who condemned human bondage aided large numbers of bondsmen to freedom. They not only called for slavery destruction, but also acted to assist its victims.

Although the Underground Railroad is linked with abolitionism of the antebellum period, it stands out primarily for its amorphous nature and mysterious character. Unlike other organized activities of the abolition movement that primarily denounced human bondage, the Underground Railroad secretly resisted slavery by abetting runaways to freedom. It confronted human bondage without any direct demands or intended violence; yet, its efforts played a prominent role in the destruction of the institution of slavery. The work of the underground was so effective that its action intimidated slaveowners. Most regarded the underground as "organized theft" and a threat to their livelihood.

The most intriguing feature of the Underground Railroad was its lack of formal organization. Its existence often relied on concerted efforts of cooperating individuals of various ethnic and religious groups who helped bondsmen escape from slavery. To add to its mysterious doings, accounts are scarce for individuals who actually participated in its activities. Usually agents hid or destroyed their personal journals to protect themselves and the runaways. Only recently researchers have learned of the work rendered by courageous agents such as David Ruggles, Calvin Fairbank, Josiah Henson, and Erastus Hussey. The identity of others who also contributed to this effort will never be fully recognized. Though scholars estimate that Underground Railroad conductors assisted thousands of refugees, the total number of runaways whom they aided to freedom will never be known simply because of the movement's secrecy. Conductors usually did not attempt to record these figures, and those who did only calculated the number of runaways whom they personally helped. Moreover, these estimations should consider that some runaways never took part in the underground system and therefore used other creative methods to attain liberty. The shortage of evidence indicates that scholars probably will never fully learn the real significance of the Underground Railroad. Indeed, the few journals that have survived over the years suggest that the true heroes of the underground were not the abolitionists or sympathizers, but those runaway bondsmen who were willing to risk their lives to gain freedom.

SLAVERY IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE - 1500 -  
1865



The historical evolution of slavery in the Western Hemisphere is essential to understanding the importance of the underground phenomenon. The first large-scale enslavement of African peoples by Western Europeans began in the 1440s when Portugal engaged in slave trading with West Africa, probably to service sugar plantations in the Atlantic Islands. By the early 16th century, Western European nations had developed an organized slavery system in the Caribbean and the Americas. European landowners first used enslaved Amerindians and indentured Whites to cultivate plantations in the New World. Labor problems increased significantly among these groups as Amerindians consistently fought and escaped from their captors. Their populations moreover decreased into almost nonexistence as thousands of them perished from European-contracted diseases and exhaustion. The near decimation of the Amerindians prompted Bishop Bartolome de las Casas to take up their cause in protecting the remaining populations. Appointed by the Spanish government as "Protector of the Indians," Las Casas demanded that Spain liberate the Amerindians and to recognize their rights as a people. This decree led to a shortage of field hands that compelled Spain to seek bonded labor elsewhere. Las Casas humanitarian sentiment, however, did not extend to Africans whom he endorsed their enslavement to meet the growing demand for labor in the territories. As a result, Spain issued an *asiento* (or contract) to Portugal who supplied the Spanish colonies with enslaved Africans (Williams 1984: 33-37; Shillington 1989: 173-78).

The notorious trans-Atlantic slave trade, also known as the "triangular trade," was primarily responsible for the dispersal of Africans into the Western Hemisphere. This lucrative enterprise reached its peak during the 1600s and lasted well into the late 1880s. Millions of peoples from East, Southwest, and West Africa were enslaved and transported to the European colonies in the New World. European landowners forced Africans and some Amerindians to toil on sugar, tobacco, and coffee plantations established in the New World (Azevedo 1993; Shillington 1989: 198-201).

By the early 1600s, Western Europeans extended their plantation system into North America. Slave traders frequently shipped surplus African laborers from the West Indies into North America to cultivate the tobacco, sugar, rice, and indigo plantations. The first Africans arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. Scholars contend that British colonists first recognized these African laborers as indentured servants. Their status, however, soon changed when in 1641 the Massachusetts colony sanctioned the enslavement of African workers. Similarly, Maryland and Virginia authorized legal servitude in 1660. Their laws specified that Africans would serve in bondage for life, and that a child born into the colony inherited the status of its mother. By 1755, all 13 colonies had legally recognized chattel slavery (Higginbotham 1978: 35-36, 252; Stamp 1956: 22).

Legal bondage varied in colonial North America due to the diverse climates and geographic conditions of the region. In the North, most Africans labored on small farms. Those who lived in cities worked as personal servants or were hired out as domestics and skilled workers. Although northern colonists had little use for slave labor, they accumulated substantial profits from the lucrative slave trading industry. Conversely, southern colonies grew quite dependent on human bondage. Landowners often purchased African laborers to toil their tobacco, sugar, cotton, rice, and indigo plantations. By the 1770s, bonded labor became increasingly vital to the southern economy, and the demand for African workers contributed greatly to the steady increase of their population. This growth coupled with the threat of insurrections induced colonial legislatures to pass "slave" codes that restricted the movement of enslaved Africans and Native Americans. While White colonists petitioned for independence from Great Britain, antislavery advocates also demanded human rights and liberty for all people, including bondsmen.

Shortly after the War of Independence, a call to abolish slavery and the slave trade generated widespread support for the antislavery movement. Led by liberated African Americans and



Quakers, the antislavery movement swayed northern state legislatures to grant immediate manumissions to soldier-slaves and gradual emancipation to other enslaved Africans. Northern slaveholders allowed some bondsmen to purchase their freedom, while others petitioned for liberation through the courts. Legal bondage still remained a vital element of the southern society despite attempts to end the institution there.

The nation grew divided on the slavery question, the opportunity to eliminate the institution completely was stalled in 1787 when the United States Constitution permitted the slave trade to continue until 1808 and protected involuntary servitude where it then existed. More importantly, in 1793 federal law allowed for a Fugitive Slave Law, which not only called for the return of bonded and indentured runaways, but also threatened the protection of freed African Americans.

The emergence of the cotton gin in 1793 revolutionized cotton agriculture and the chance of abolishing slavery permanently grew bleak for antislavery supporters. Though tobacco, rice, sugar, and indigo were major cash crops, "King Cotton" ruled the southern economy. Cotton production rose from 13,000 bales in 1792 to more than 5 million bales by 1860. Consequently, the South served as the principal supplier of raw cotton for northern and European textile industries. Bonded labor became essential to cotton cultivation due to its overwhelming demand. In fact, the increased need for bonded workers caused the African American population to escalate from 700,000 in 1790 to nearly 4 million by 1860 (Boyer et al. 1995: 163, 246; Franklin 1988: 112-13). Involuntary servitude was a recognized institution in the Old South and remained so until 1865. Although African bondsmen were often forced to work under inhumane conditions, they did not do so without protest. Response to their situation included destroying property, feigning sickness, performing self-mutilation, stealing, rebelling, committing suicide, and running away.

## THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

### Runaways and the Abolition Movement

Slave resistance occurred wherever bondage existed. The brutality of involuntary servitude and the yearning for freedom inspired most bondsmen to rebel against their conditions. Bondsmen consistently used flight as a form of resistance. Escapes occurred as early as the 1500s when African captives arrived in the Spanish colonies. In Spanish North America, some bondsmen escaped and took refuge with Native American groups who welcomed the runaways as members of their communities. Others absconded into unclaimed territories and secluded areas and formed maroon or free societies there. Later, maroon settlements were primarily found in the Great Dismal Swamp in North Carolina and Virginia, the bayous of Louisiana, and the mountainous regions of Kentucky and Tennessee. These communities usually offered shelter to thousands of fellow refugees. In the early 1700s, hundreds of enslaved Africans and Native Americans sought refuge in Spanish Florida which accorded them liberty. This act indeed posed a threat to White settlers in nearby British, French, Danish, and Dutch territories. African runaways often lived and intermarried with Native American groups such as the Creeks and Muscogee who provided them protection. Eventually this group of peoples became known as the "Seminoles" (a Native American word meaning runaway). Hundreds of African refugees from the Carolinas and Georgia

historically sought asylum with the Seminoles and freed African communities such as the Garcia de Santa Teresa de Mose (Fort Mose) and the Negro Fort (Fort Gadsden). According to historian John Blassingame, "by 1836 there were more than 1,200 maroons living in Seminole towns" (Buckmaster 1992: 18; Thompson 1987: 284-85; Gara 1961: 28-29; Preston 1933: 150; Deagan 1991: 5; Blassingame 1979: 211).



In the British North America and later the United States, antislavery sentiment flourished during the revolutionary period, but faded slightly by the beginning of the early 19th century. The call to end human bondage compelled freed African Americans and Quakers to form abolition societies such as the American Anti-Slavery Society and the New England Anti-Slavery Society in the North. Moreover, churches such as African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist, African Methodist Episcopal on, Presbyterian, and Methodist as well as Black fraternal organizations and social clubs played key roles in calling for emancipation and human rights.

The strength of abolitionism was in its diversity. At one extreme, African American writers and lecturers such as Olaudah Equiano, Francis Watkins Harper, Sojourner Truth, David Walker, and Charles L. Remond condemned slavery and the slave trade through their literary publications and speeches. Moreover, antislavery supporters reported the conditions of bondsmen, ideology, and work of abolitionism in the *Freedom's Journal*, *Liberator*, and *North Star* newspapers. In the other extreme, abolitionism took form in slave insurrections that were usually planned and/or led by radicals and bondsmen such as Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and John Brown. Inspired in part by the success of the Haitian Revolution, the number of revolts that occurred in the United States from 1790 to 1865 was small compared to other slave societies in the Western Hemisphere. Though these revolts were generally unsuccessful, the threat of their actions was a potent force to abolitionism (Strickland and Reich 1974: 125).

The most controversial aspect of the antislavery movement was the effort at colonization of both enslaved and liberated African Americans. Such groups like the American Colonization Society (ACS), mostly "viewed colonization as a means of uplifting the free [African] and of extending Christian missions to far-off lands." By the 1820s, abolitionists in England and the United States established two African colonies, Sierra Leone and Liberia, as a means to rid African Americans from White society. In fact, the ACS moved nearly 12,000 African Americans to Africa and other areas outside the United States. Not surprisingly, most African Americans, especially in the North, vehemently opposed the motives of the ACS. Yet some African Americans like Paul Cuffee supported its ideals and helped relocate about 3,000 African American emigrants to areas in Africa, the western territories, and Canada. Since few African Americans actually emigrated to these areas, schemes of this type generally failed (Quarles 1969; Franklin 1988: 155-56).

The antislavery movement played a primary role in assisting runaways to freedom. Abolitionists were crucial to the operations of the underground, but not all of them participated in or sanctioned its activities. Occasionally, African American and White abolitionists worked jointly to aid the runaway. Yet for the most part, the African American abolitionist played a key role in underground activities. Since most African American abolitionists were former bondsmen, they usually took a personal interest in helping loved ones or anyone who wanted to gain freedom. Their work contributed to the success of the Underground Railroad.

## Origins of the Underground Railroad

Evidence is unclear when the "underground" began; however, Henrietta Buckmaster, author of *Let My People Go*, asserts that "the first fugitive slave who asked for help from a member of his own race or the enemy race drove the first stake in that 'railroad'" (Buckmaster 1992: 11). One of the earliest recorded "organized" escapes may have occurred in 1786 when Quakers in Philadelphia assisted a group of refugees from Virginia to freedom (Blockson 1984: 9; Siebert 1896: 460). One year later, Isaac T. Hopper, a Quaker teenager, "began to organize a system for hiding and aiding fugitive slaves." Soon, several towns in Pennsylvania and New Jersey offered assistance to runaways (Haskins 1993: 9). Organized flight became evident in 1804 when General Thomas



Boudes, a revolutionary officer of Columbia, Pennsylvania, aided and then refused to surrender a runaway bondsman to the owner (Buckmaster 1992: 23). By the 1830s, participation in furtive activity increased, and abolitionists recognized the underground as an effective weapon of attack against human bondage.

1831, the popularity of the railroad train coupled with legendary flights of certain runaways introduced the name for the underground movement. Supposedly, the term Underground Railroad originated when an enslaved runaway, Tice Davids, fled from Kentucky and may have taken refuge with John Rankin, a White abolitionist, in Ripley, Ohio. Determined to retrieve his property, the owner chased Davids to the Ohio River, but Davids suddenly disappeared without a trace, leaving his owner bewildered and wondering if the slave had "gone off on some underground road." The success of Davids' escape soon spread among the enslaved on southern plantations (Stein 1981: 5p10; Hamilton 1993: 53-56).

## Organization and Operations of the Underground Railroad

Determined bondsmen escaped whenever there was an opportunity to do so. Historian Larry Gara maintains in *The Liberty Line* that "fugitives who rode the underground line often did so after having already completed the most difficult and dangerous phase of their journey alone and unaided."

Typically, enslaved African Americans who fled from plantations and cities in Delaware, District of Columbia, Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and Virginia were more likely to take refuge in northern states, Canada, and western territories. In contrast, those who lived in the Deep South often ensured their freedom by escaping into Mexico and the Caribbean. Among other locations to which they fled were maroon societies, Native American groups, and large southern cities such as Baltimore, New Orleans, and Charleston, South Carolina (Gara 1961: 18, 29; Breyfogle 1958: 33; Fields 1985: 16).

For the most part, no national organization of the underground existed since "leadership in it was reached by individual performance and examples, not by election or appointment" (Breyfogle 1958: 173-74). In spite of this, "there was a semblance of underground railroad activity in certain localities" (Gara 1961: 18). Underground operations generally relied heavily on secret codes as railroad jargon alerted "passengers" when travel was safe. Runaways usually commuted either alone or in small groups, and were frequently assisted by African American and White "conductors" who risked their lives and property to escort refugees to freedom. Celebrated conductors of the Underground Railroad included James Fairfield, a White abolitionist who went into the Deep South and rescued enslaved African Americans by posing as a slave trader. In 1849, Harriet Tubman escaped from the Eastern Shore of Maryland and became known as "Moses" to her people when she made 19 trips to the South and helped deliver at least 300 fellow captives and loved ones to liberation. African American abolitionist John Parker of Ripley, Ohio, frequently ventured to Kentucky and Virginia and helped transport by boat hundreds of runaways across the Ohio River. Perhaps the closest the underground came to being formally organized was during the 1830s when African American abolitionists William Still, Robert Purvis, David Ruggles, and others organized and stationed vigilance committees throughout the North to help bondsmen to freedom. The intention of the vigilance committees was not to lure or personally guide runaways to freedom, but to offer whatever assistance they needed to reach their destinations.

Most runaways were men whose ages ranged from 16 to 35 years. Similarly, women and children escaped. However, compared to men, their numbers were small since they were more likely to be captured. Runaways generally labored as field hands and were most likely to endure harsh treatment from their owners. Men and women escaped for some of the same reasons - long,



grueling hours of fieldwork, the lack of proper diet, the fear of beatings, and the horror of being sold away from loved ones. Urban bondsmen sometimes fared better than their plantation fellows since most of them worked as hired hands and personal servants. Still, masters offered them little or no pay, restricted their movement, and provided them poor living conditions. Although these inhumane conditions inspired some to flee, the desire for personal liberty played a leading part in causing most bonded men and women to flee (Franklin 1988: 169; Meier and Rudwick: 1976; White 1991: 106-07). Examples of this are found in several autobiographies written by former bondsmen. In 1835, James L. Bradley, for instance, tenderly recalled his yearning for freedom when he wrote:

*From the time I was fourteen years old, I used to think a great deal about freedom. It was my heart's desire; I could not keep it out of my mind. Many a sleepless night I have spent in tears, because I was a slave. . . . My heart ached to feel within me the life of liberty"*

(Blassingame 1977: 688)

In his *Life and Times*, Frederick Douglass echoed the same sentiment:

*I hated slavery always, and my desire for freedom needed only a favorable breeze to fan it to a blaze at any moment. The thought of being a creature of the present and the past troubled me, and I longed to have a future p a future with hope in it.*

(Douglass 1962; 1892: 156).

Runaways seldom devised any elaborate escape plan since flight occurred randomly. Their schemes sometimes called for escapes to take place on the weekends, holidays, or during harvest season. Plans of this nature gave the runaway at least a two-day start before authorities began their pursuit. Some spiritual songs such as "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Steal Away to Jesus," and "Go Down Moses" carried coded messages related to escape. Runaways had little food or clothing and normally walked at nightfall and rested during the daytime. Often refugees faced the risks of natural disasters and personal betrayal such as being sold back into slavery. Since runaways were virtually on their own and underground railways rarely began in the South, the North Star occasionally directed the flight. On clouded evenings, tree moss, which grew on the north side of tree trunks, then served as a guide. Runaways refrained from using conventional roads patrolled by slave catchers. To avoid capture, they relied on "railways" such as backroads, waterways, mountains, swamps, forests, and fields to escape. Later, runaways sometimes traveled by wagon, steamship, boat, and railroad train.

Flight sometimes entailed clever disguises, which gave further protection to the runaway. For example, females dressed as males and males disguised as females; or fair-skinned African Americans passed as Whites; and others pretended to deliver messages or goods for their masters. Although most disguises were rather simple, some runaways like Ellen and William Craft of Georgia plotted brilliant plans of escape by masquerading as master and slave. Frederick Douglass used ingenuity by posing as a sailor while making his escape from Maryland to New York. Henry "Box" Brown, with the assistance of underground agents, went as far as to ship himself by train in a crate from Richmond to Philadelphia (Haskins 1993: 94; Blassingame 1979: 200; William Still 1872: 67-73).

During the exodus, refugees received food, shelter, and money at "stations," which were operated by anyone who offered assistance. They regularly rested at stations conducted by abolitionists like Jermaine W. Loguen, William Still, Levi Coffin, and Thomas Garrett. These shelters were normally found about 10 to 30 miles apart on northbound "railways" (Franklin 1988: 169; Gara 1961: 94). As



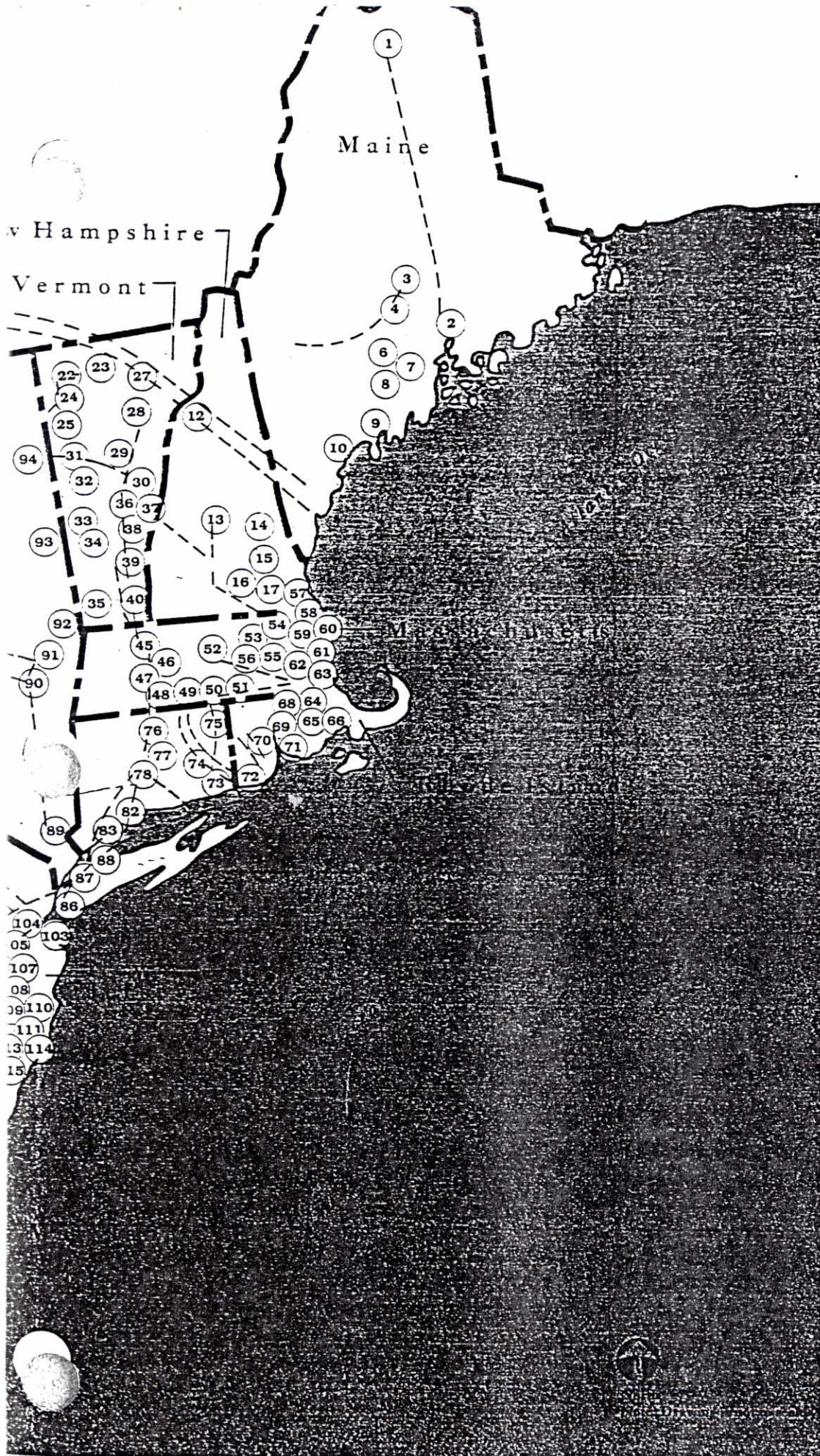
one source claimed, "that was the distance a healthy man could travel on foot, or a wagon carrying several slaves could cover at night" (Haskins 1993: 15). Some operators notified runaways of the stations through inconspicuous signals such as a brightly lit candle in a window or by a shimmering lantern strategically positioned in the frontyard. Once safety was ensured, the temporary havens provided refugees rest in concealed rooms, attics, and cellars. When stations were not readily available, runaways took protection in caves, swamps, hills, and trenches.

Underground activity flourished during the 1840s as antislavery sentiment deepened due to the federal government's failure to settle the slavery controversy. As northern and southern leaders refused to negotiate on the issue, Congress had attempted to solve the problem by ratifying the Missouri Compromise in 1820 that prohibited slavery in newly acquired territories and states. Following the Mexican War in 1848, however, the debate intensified as southern landowners sought to extend their plantation economy westward. Abolitionists nevertheless continued to assist runaways and flaunted their activity as a way to win added support for the antislavery movement. The operations of the underground seemed even more apparent after the Supreme Court announced in the case *Prigg v. Pennsylvania* (1842) that federal law did not require that state officials aid in the return of runaways. This ruling rendered by the court caused an uproar in the South.

In an attempt to reconcile sectional differences, Congress passed the Compromise of 1850 that included a revised Fugitive Slave Law. The measure declared the return of runaways, and proclaimed that federal and state officials as well as private citizens had to assist in their capture. With these restrictions, northern states were no longer considered safe havens for runaways, and the law even jeopardized the status of freedmen. Significantly, the Fugitive Slave Law enticed corrupt slave catchers to kidnap free African Americans and sell them into bondage for a hefty fee. A classic example of this is retold in the memoirs of Solomon Northup who fell victim to a notorious kidnapping ring in New York (Northup 1853; Eakin 1990). Escape destinations thus were no longer limited to the territories and northern states. Major urban centers that were safe places of refuge became increasingly dangerous for runaways. Railways were extended into Canadian cities and towns like Dresden, North Buxton, St. Catharines, Windsor, and Chatham that operated as major termini for the underground. Similarly, bondsmen who fled from Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas usually took refuge in Mexico, while those who were enslaved in the lower southeastern coastal areas absconded into the Caribbean. Although the Fugitive Slave Law threatened its operations, the Underground Railroad continued to provide assistance to refugees.

By the end of the 1850s, the slavery controversy continued to split the nation further apart as the North and South refused to agree on a solution. Regional differences over slavery mounted as significant events like the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott case in 1857, the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's renowned literary work, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the failed Harper's Ferry insurrection devised by John Brown helped precipitate the nation into a civil war by 1861. While the Civil War captured the attention of the country, underground activity continued as thousands of enslaved African Americans deserted plantations and cities and took refuge within Union lines. With the help of more than 180,000 African American soldiers and spies, Union forces secured victory over the Confederacy in 1865. Immediately following the war, the necessity for underground activities ceased when the 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution officially liberated more than 4 million enslaved African Americans.





- 1 Saint John River
- 2 Bangor
- 3 Exeter
- 4 Newport
- 5 Vassalboro \*
- 6 China
- 7 Augusta
- 8 Gardiner
- 9 Brunswick
- 10 Portland
- 11 Salem \*

#### New Hampshire

- 12 Littleton
- 13 Canaan
- 14 Meredith
- 15 Concord
- 16 Peterborough
- 17 Milford
- 18 Canterbury \*
- 19 Hancock \*
- 20 Lyme \*
- 21 Weare \*

#### Vermont


- 22 Swanton
- 23 Troy
- 24 St. Albans
- 25 Burlington
- 26 Franklin \*
- 27 Barton
- 28 Hardwick
- 29 Montpelier
- 30 Strafford
- 31 Charlotte
- 32 Brandon
- 33 Fair Haven
- 34 Castleton
- 35 Bennington
- 36 Woodstock, S. Woods
- 37 Hartland Four Corners
- 38 Windsor
- 39 Chester
- 40 Brattleboro
- 41 Royalton \*
- 42 Albany \*
- 43 Georgia \*
- 44 Ferrisburg \*

#### Massachusetts

- 45 Greenfield
- 46 Hatfield
- 47 Northampton
- 48 Springfield
- 49 E. Longmeadow
- 50 Worcester





- 
- 51 Millbury
  - 52 Leominster
  - 53 Concord
  - 54 Andover
  - 55 Cambridge
  - 56 Newton
  - 57 Amesbury
  - 58 Georgetown
  - 59 Danvers
  - 60 Salem
  - 61 Lynn
  - 62 Stoneham
  - 63 Boston
  - 64 Fall River
  - 65 Westport
  - 66 New Bedford
  - 67 Florence \*

#### Rhode Island

- 68 Central Falls
- 69 Pawtucket
- 70 Providence
- 71 Newport
- 72 Westerly

#### Connecticut

- 73 New London
- 74 Norwich
- 75 Putnam
- 76 Enfield
- 77 Hartford
- 78 Farmington
- 79 Torrington \*
- 80 Oxford \*
- 81 Wilton \*
- 82 New Haven
- 83 Stamford
- 84 Old Lyme \*
- 85 Canterbury \*

#### New York

- 86 New York City
- 87 Brooklyn
- 88 Flushing Queens
- 89 Tarrytown
- 90 Albany
- 91 Troy
- 92 Hoosick
- 93 Ft. Edward
- 94 Lake Placid
- 95 Syracuse
- 96 Ithaca
- 97 Peterboro \*
- 98 Leon \*
- 99 Henderson \*
- 100 Franklin \*
- 101 Upper Sanborn \*
- 102 Whitesboro \*

#### New Jersey

- 103 Perth Amboy
- 104 New Brunswick
- 105 Hopewell
- 106 Lambertville
- 107 Princeton
- 108 Trenton
- 109 Bordentown
- 110 Camden
- 111 Burlington
- 112 Woodbury
- 113 Sewell
- 114 Mt. Holly
- 115 Marlton
- 116 Swedesboro
- 117 Salem
- 118 Greenwich \*
- 119 Evesham \*
- 120 Mt. Laurel \*
- 121 Lawnside \*

#### Pennsylvania

- 122 Philadelphia
- 123 Norristown
- 124 Quakertown
- 125 Phoenixville
- 126 Reading
- 127 Lansdale
- 128 Pine Forge
- 129 Columbia
- 130 Lewisburg
- 131 Williamsport
- 132 Milroy
- 133 Gettysburg
- 134 Coatsville
- 135 Downingtown
- 136 Malvern
- 137 Kennett Square
- 138 Clarksville \*
- 139 Lincoln University \*
- 140 Hopewell Furnace NHS
- 141 Germantown

#### District of Columbia

- 142 Georgetown
- 143 District of Columbia

#### Delaware

- 144 Willow Grove
- 145 Wilmington
- 146 Middleton
- 147 Odessa
- 148 Camden
- 149 Dover
- 150 Lebanon \*
- 151 New Castle
- \* Not located on map

#### AREA 3

### DOCUMENTED LAND ROUTES WITH CITIES AND TOWNS

Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts,  
Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey,  
Pennsylvania, District of Columbia, Delaware

#### Underground Railroad

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



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## THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN CONCORD

As can be seen by the map included in the general information section of this binder, many towns in Massachusetts were active in the underground railroad. Concord was too.

In general, residents of Concord were against slavery but opinion differed on the support of abolitionism. Many believed the abolitionists were too extreme and would destroy the Union while trying to destroy slavery. Some believed a gradual approach to ending slavery was preferable. Some abolitionists, while desiring the destruction of slavery, were not active in the underground railroad. Concord reflected the divisions in the country.

Some Concordians, such as Abner Hosmer, Josiah Bartlett, Mary Rice, Jane Barrett, William Whiting, John Welder and Mary Merrick Brooks were members of the Middlesex County Antislavery Society which was organized in 1830. The Society held its first meeting in the Concord church. Bronson Alcott joined in 1841 and wrote articles for the organization.<sup>1</sup>

Mary Merrick Brooks, wife of Nathan Brooks, was president of the Concord Women's Antislavery Society which was organized in the 1830s and consisted of about seventy members. Among the members were Helen Thoreau, sister of Henry, Maria Thoreau, Henry's aunt, Lidian Emerson, wife of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mrs. Joseph Ward and her daughter Prudence, Mary Rice, Ann Bigelow, wife of Francis Edwin Bigelow, and Abby Alcott, wife of A. Bronson Alcott. The group planned functions, such as fairs, that raised money to assist in the antislavery effort. Brooks sold cakes, that she called Brooks cakes and made from her own recipe, to her friends and neighbors in order to raise funds.<sup>2</sup> Money was needed to provide food, clothing and train tickets to fugitives. The society "soon contributed more to the abolitionist cause than any other local society in New England."<sup>3</sup>

Brooks was very active in the abolitionist movement and, as will be seen, in the underground railroad in Concord. She has been described as "probably Concord's leading woman abolitionist."<sup>4</sup> She had influence with the male leaders of Concord and was also

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<sup>1</sup>Barbara K. Elliott and Janet W. Jones, *Concord: Its Black History*, (Concord: Concord Public Schools, 1976) pp. 72, 76; Paul Brooks, *The People of Concord: One Year in the Flowering of New England*, (Chester, CT: Globe Pequot Press, 1990) p. 75.

<sup>2</sup>Elliott, *Concord*, pp. 78, 97.

<sup>3</sup>Brooks, *People of Concord*, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup>Elliot, *Concord Its Black History*, p. 96



able to mobilize others for fund raising and other abolitionist activities. Anne Warren Weston, a young woman working for the abolitionist movement, stayed a few day with Brooks in 1841. She wrote about her that "I never saw a woman more truly independent and conscientious. She is very lively and very good tempered and perfectly fearless -- what the transcendentalists might hail as 'the truest of women' --".<sup>5</sup>

In 1844 Brooks urged Ralph Waldo Emerson to speak in favor of abolitionism as part of a celebration of the anniversary of the emancipation of the slaves of the West Indies. He agreed. This event would be the first time Emerson had spoken publicly against slavery. Supporters of abolitionism believed his support would help their cause.<sup>6</sup>

Due to rain, the event had to be held indoors. The churches in Concord would not allow their facilities to be used. Churches at the time were not supportive of the abolitionists because they were believed to be too extreme and irresponsible. The abolitionists used the courthouse instead. The sexton of the First Parish Church refused to ring the town bell to summon the townspeople to the meeting. The selectmen would not order him to ring the bell, and no one else had the courage to ring it. When Henry David Thoreau understood the situation, he rang the bell, and Emerson was able to deliver his speech to those who assembled.<sup>7</sup>

Besides raising money for the abolitionist cause and speaking in favor of it, some Concord residents were active in the underground railroad. In the nation, assistance to fugitive slaves has been documented to the early nineteenth century. The organized system of aid that developed over time was not called the underground railroad until 1831 when steam railroads became popular and train terminology was applied to the system.<sup>8</sup>

It is difficult to trace when the first fugitive was helped by someone in Concord. Secrecy, of course, was vital. By the 1830s

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<sup>5</sup>Letter, Anne Warren Weston to Deborah Weston, September 16, 1841, partially reprinted in *The Concord Saunterer*, 17 (December 1984), p. 48.

<sup>6</sup>Townsend Scudder, *Concord: American Town*, (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1947) p. 201; Milton Meltzer and Walter Harding, *A Thoreau Profile*, (New York: Thomas Y Crowell, Co., 1962), p. 193 and Walter Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), p. 175.

<sup>7</sup>Harding, *The Days of Henry Thoreau*, p. 175.

<sup>8</sup>John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans*, 6th ed.; (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Co., 1988) p. 168.



fugitives may have been helped by residents of Concord. It may have been earlier. It is certain that Concord was assisting slaves in the 1840s. As will be seen in the next segment of the binder, the Alcott family at Hillside, as they called the Wayside, helped at least one fugitive in 1847.

Before 1850 the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law governed the return of runaway slaves to their owners. Under the law either the owner or his agent could seize a fugitive and bring the fugitive before a judge or magistrate. Government authorities did not have to assist with the arrest of a fugitive. Once the owner or agent provided testimony that the person was an escaped slave or presented the magistrate with an affidavit from a magistrate from the state which the fugitive had fled, the owner or agent received a warrant allowing the fugitive to be taken back to the state from which he/she had escaped. A \$500 fine could be levied on those hindering an arrest or rescuing or harboring a fugitive after notification had been given that the person was a fugitive. The law, however, was ineffective and "enforcement provisions vague".<sup>9</sup>

Because the 1793 law was ineffective, slaveholders had tried for years to have it amended. It was replaced by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, which was part of the 1850 Compromise, and was a much stricter law. The 1850 law required all citizens to assist in the capture of a fugitive. If someone prevented the arrest of a fleeing slave or tried to help the runaway by hiding him/her, that person could be fined a thousand dollars, imprisoned up to six months and liable for civil damages of a thousand dollars for each slave.<sup>10</sup> Government authorities were required to arrest known fugitives.

The new law created additional fear among African Americans in the North who had escaped from slavery years earlier. Many went to Canada once the new law went into effect. The law created panic among African Americans in Boston.<sup>11</sup> They abhorred the thought of being reenslaved after having experienced freedom. Because the enforcement of the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law was relatively lax, many fugitives were able to live in freedom for years in the North. Their lives, however, were never totally free from the fear of being captured. In Boston free African Americans and African Americans who had escaped from the South had formed a community. That community now was threatened by the new law.

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<sup>9</sup>Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom*, (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1898), p. 21; Gary Collison, *Shadrack Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 51, 52.

<sup>10</sup>Siebert, *The Underground Railroad*, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>Collison, *Shadrack Minkins*, pp. 76, 77.



Although African Americans in the North were never totally secure in their freedom, they had been committed through the years to obtaining freedom for fugitives who were escaping from slavery, and they had a dominant role in the underground railroad. In 1841 a Vigilance Committee was formed in Boston composed of African Americans and whites to aid fugitive slaves and prevent them from being captured.<sup>12</sup> "Every legal, peaceful and Christian method and none other" were to be used to assist fugitives.<sup>13</sup>

Some African Americans directly helped fugitives to escape. Others raised money to support underground railroad activities. African-American churches had an active role. In Boston Leonard A. Grimes, a free African American from Virginia, became the minister of the Twelfth Baptist Church which was an important stop on the underground railroad. He helped plan the escape of fugitives from federal authorities.<sup>14</sup>

In response to further restrictions placed on the help that could be given to fugitives, by July of 1842 Boston African Americans had formed the New England Freedom Association. The objectives of the organization were to protect the African Americans of Boston and to provide legal and illegal aid to fugitives. The use of illegal means to help fugitives set this group apart from the Vigilance Committee which relied on legal and peaceful means.<sup>15</sup>

Although the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law provided severe penalties for those who violated it, in the nation the peak years of activity in the underground railroad were between 1850 and 1860, the years just after passage of the law and just before the beginning of the Civil War.<sup>16</sup> The same pattern appeared in Concord. "From the day of the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, the underground railroad was organized and active, and nearly every week some fugitive would be forwarded with the utmost secrecy to Concord to be harbored overnight and usually sped on his way before day light."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Philip S. Foner, *History of Black Americans: From the Emergence of the Cotton Kingdom to the Eve of the Compromise of 1850*, (Westport, CT, Greenwood Press, 1983) pp. 481, 491.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 505.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 493, 510.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 507.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 482.

<sup>17</sup>E. W. Emerson, "Notes on the Underground Railway, and the Concord Station and Officers", Made in 1892 from Memory of a Talk with Mrs. Bigelow, 1915 Typed Transcript by Allen French, Concord



Both before and after the passage of the 1850 law, assisting a fugitive to quickly and safely move North or to Canada was the goal of those who were part of the underground railroad. During the journey a fugitive often was sheltered in a house or other building for a night or two. In the terminology that the underground railroad borrowed from the railroad, these buildings were called stations and the person at the station was a stationmaster or agent. If a fugitive was guided by someone from station to station, that person was a conductor. Brakemen were people who sent a fugitive to a station but did not take the fugitive to a station.<sup>18</sup>

One of the established routes of the underground railroad for fugitives in Boston was to Leominster and Fitchburg. At Leominster and Fitchburg escaped slaves could board the real train that would take them further north to Canada. Those assisting them believed boarding at smaller towns was safer for the runaways. To reach Leominster and Fitchburg, there were people along the route from Boston who helped the escapees. Concord was known as a place that sheltered fugitives.<sup>19</sup> It "was a place of resort for fugitives."<sup>20</sup>

Mary Merrick Brooks, Mary Rice, Ann and Francis Bigelow, Henry David Thoreau, his mother and aunts, Dr. Josiah Bartlett, William Whiting and others were part of the Concord underground railroad network. Rice lived near the Old Hill Burying Ground. Her home served as a station for sheltering fugitives, as did the homes of the Bigelows, Thoreaus and the Brooks. (See the map at Appendix 1 showing the locations of the homes of Rice, the Brooks, the Bigelows and Dr. Bartlett in 1852.) Dr. Bartlett who served Concord as a physician from 1820 to 1877 drove fugitives in his carriage to the next station on the underground railroad and even to Fitchburg where they could board a train.<sup>21</sup>

Thoreau sheltered fugitives during the day at Walden Pond and brought them to safe houses in Concord for the night.<sup>22</sup> At times he would accompany a fugitive on the train to Leominster or Fitchburg, although he would not sit with the fugitive in order

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Free Public Library, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup>Foner, *History of Black Americans*, p. 482.

<sup>19</sup>Siebert, *The Underground Railroad*, pp. 36, 132.

<sup>20</sup>Letter, F. B. Sanborn, February 1, 1896, quoted in Siebert, *The Underground Railroad*, p. 132.

<sup>21</sup>*Memoirs of Members of the Social Circle in Concord*, Second Series 1795-1840, (Cambridge, MA, The Riverside Press, 1888) pp. 174, 181.

<sup>22</sup>Paul Brooks, *The People of Concord*, p. 76.



not to raise suspicions. Thoreau also purchased train tickets for fugitives who traveled by themselves.<sup>23</sup>

The first African American arrested in New England under the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was Shadrack Minkins. In reports on his arrest he most often was referred to as Shadrack. His arrest occurred on February 15, 1851. Minkins had escaped to Boston from his owner, John De Bree of Norfolk, Virginia, nine months earlier. In Boston he called himself Frederick Wilkins or Jenkins and worked as a waiter at the Cornhill Coffee House.<sup>24</sup>

After his arrest national attention was focused on Boston and on his case. Minkins' case was considered the first real test of the Fugitive Slave Law and of the 1850 Compromise, of which the Fugitive Slave Law was a component, because Boston was the center of the abolitionist movement. If the law was not enforced, the South would consider the 1850 Compromise not viable.

After his arrest by Deputy Marshal Patrick Riley under a warrant by John Caphard of Norfolk, Virginia, Minkins appeared before George T. Curtis, a federal commissioner, at the U.S. Courthouse in Boston. The Boston African-American community quickly learned of the arrest and members of the community began to gather at the Courthouse. After the initial hearing ended, a group of free African Americans from Boston was able forcibly to rescue Minkins. The crowd surrounding him moved toward the area of the city where the African-American community was located. Elizabeth Riley, an African American, temporarily hid him in her attic while Minkins' rescuers, including Lewis Hayden, a leader among Boston African Americans, and Robert Morris, an African-American lawyer who had been part of the defense team for Minkins, developed further plans.<sup>25</sup>

From Riley's home Minkins and Hayden travelled by cab to Cambridge in order to escape pursuit by the authorities. In Cambridge Hayden hired a carriage, and Minkins and he drove to Watertown where they spent the afternoon to allow the frenzy surrounding the escape to abate. The two then returned to East Cambridge and the home of the Reverend L. C. Lovejoy, who was an abolitionist and whose brother, Elijah, an antislavery newspaper editor, had been killed by a mob in Illinois in 1837. From the Lovejoy home Hayden and John J. Smith, an African-American barber and activist in Boston, took Minkins by carriage to Concord and the home of Francis Bigelow, the blacksmith, and his wife, Ann.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Emerson, "Notes on the Underground Railway", pp. 2, 3.

<sup>24</sup>Collison, *Shadrack Minkins*, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 126, 128, 130.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 131, 132, 133.



The Bigelows lived across Sudbury Road from the home of Nathan and Mary Merrick Brooks. The Brooks house was located at the point where Main Street branches into Sudbury Road and Main Street. The Concord Free Public Library currently stands where the Brooks house was. When the library was built, the Brooks house was moved from the site to Hubbard Street.

As a lawyer Nathan Brooks "believed that it was his duty as a good citizen to obey the law."<sup>27</sup> Assisting a fugitive in any manner was a violation of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the violator could be severely punished. Although Nathan Brooks was an abolitionists, he was not active in the underground railroad as his wife was. Anne Warren Weston, an abolitionist who stayed with the Brooks, described Nathan as "he is as good an abolitionist as his social standing will permit."<sup>28</sup>

In many ways Nathan Brooks is an example of many Americans at the time who were good people, who were against slavery and yet who believed that obeying the law was more important than assisting people trying to escape an evil and unjust system. Some believed that if the law was not obeyed mob rule or anarchy would result.

Because of Nathan's beliefs, Mary kept her underground railroad activities secret from him, although he, of course, was aware of her public abolitionist activities, such as fund raising and encouraging people to speak against slavery. In mid nineteenth century America for a wife to conceal from her husband the fact that she was breaking a serious law is remarkable. At that time women had few rights and were dependent on their husbands for economic support, for their legal standing and for their status in the community. For Mary to be able to see the importance of helping fugitives, despite the repercussions to her personal life, if she was discovered in violation of the law, demonstrates her courageousness and great commitment to the cause of freedom for slaves.

Shadrack Minkins along with Lewis Hayden and John J. Smith arrived at the Bigelow home on the night of February 15, 1851. Francis Bigelow went across the road to the Brooks home and sought the help of Mary Merrick Brooks by saying that his wife was ill. Despite Mary's assurances that his help was not needed, Nathan decided to accompany Mary to the Bigelow house in case he could be of assistance. At the Bigelow house he and Mary saw the fugitive, Shadrack Minkins. At that point Nathan Brooks was forced to make a moral judgement. It was clear to him that a fugitive was being helped to escape and that his wife and neighbors were aiding the fugitive. They were breaking the law. Nathan Brooks' conscience rather than his training as a lawyer guided him. He provided Minkins with a hat and perhaps a

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<sup>27</sup>Emerson, "Notes on the Underground Railway", p. 2

<sup>28</sup>Letter, Anne Warren Weston to Deborah Weston, p. 48.



coat.<sup>29</sup> A simple gesture of kindness, such as he made, was a violation of the Fugitive Slave Law. He had also broken the law.

During the few hours that Minkins was in Concord, the Bigelows fed him and sheltered him in their home. After Minkins had rested for a short time, Bigelow drove him in a carriage to Leominster and the home of Frances and Jonathan Drake. Facts concerning the rest of Minkins' trip to Canada are sketchy. It appears that he crossed into New Hampshire on either February 17 or 18 and entered Canada from Vermont on approximately February 20.<sup>30</sup>

The reaction in Boston to Minkins' escape was mixed. Abolitionists were overjoyed. Others believed his rescue signaled the rise of mob rule. Several newspapers in Boston were supportive of the 1850 Compromise.<sup>31</sup> Those supportive of the Compromise saw this violation of the Fugitive Slave Law as a step towards destroying the Compromise and increasing the antagonism between North and South.

The nation also reacted strongly. Minkins' rescue was the lead story in newspapers throughout the country for a week. In the Senate Henry Clay of Kentucky, who had helped formulate the 1850 Compromise, denounced the violation of the Fugitive Slave Law. President Millard Fillmore discussed the issue with his cabinet and considered sending federal troops to Boston. Daniel Webster as Secretary of State was able to reassure the President that mob rule was not imminent in Boston and troops did not need to be sent. Fillmore issued a proclamation that all citizens should obey the law, military and civil authorities should assist in the capture of Minkins and those who aided Minkins should be prosecuted.<sup>32</sup>

Although the rescue of Minkins was the first time the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law was broken in New England, it was not the last time a fugitive was helped to escape and not the last time that people in Concord assisted a fugitive. On October 1, 1851 Thoreau wrote in his Journal that he had put a fugitive named Henry Williams on the train. Williams had also worked at the Cornhill Coffee House as had Minkins. Williams stayed at the Thoreau home until money could be gathered to pay for his train fare. Stories of other fugitives who were helped by the Thoreaus

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<sup>29</sup>Scudder, *Concord*, p. 208; Emerson, "Notes on the Underground Railway", pp. 3, 4.

<sup>30</sup>Collison, *Shadrack Minkins*, pp. 159, 163, 169.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 138, 139, 140.



have also been recorded.<sup>33</sup>

Later in life Ann Bigelow estimated that the Concord underground railroad helped one fugitive a week during the period after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law.<sup>34</sup> Ann Bigelow was surely exaggerating when she stated that some of the men of Concord were afraid to commit to the underground railroad but "we, women never [were]".<sup>35</sup> Her comment, however, does illustrate that women, as well as men, in Concord were an integral part of the underground railroad, and they were willing to take risks to assist fugitives.

Because secrecy was important for the operation of the underground railroad, both for the fugitive and for those helping in the escape, it is difficult to know how many people in Concord were active in the underground railroad. It is also impossible to know how many fugitives were helped. The information shared here provides some understanding of Concord's role in the underground railroad and helps place in perspective the activities of the Alcott family which are included in the next section of this binder.

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<sup>33</sup>Meltzer and Harding, *A Thoreau Profile*, pp. 199, 200.

<sup>34</sup>Collison, *Shadrack Minkins*, p. 151.

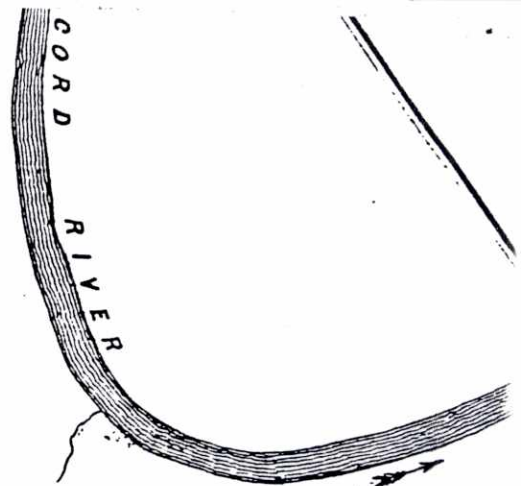
<sup>35</sup>Autograph notes enclosed in Mrs. Ann Damon to Wilbur Siebert, December 1, 1893, Siebert Collection, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus as quoted in Collison, *Shadrack Minkins*, p. 151.



## APPENDIX I

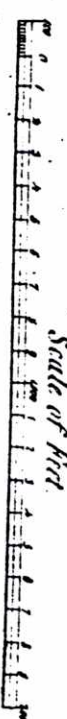
The map on the next map was part of the materials included in E. W. Emerson's "Notes on the Underground Railway, Concord, and the Concord Station and Officers". See the bibliography for the full citation. The map shows Concord in 1852. The locations of the houses of Ann and Francis Bigelow, Mary and Nathan Brooks, Mary Rice and Dr. Josiah Bartlett can be seen. They were all part of the underground railroad. The circles and numbers on the map were on the map from which this copy was made.



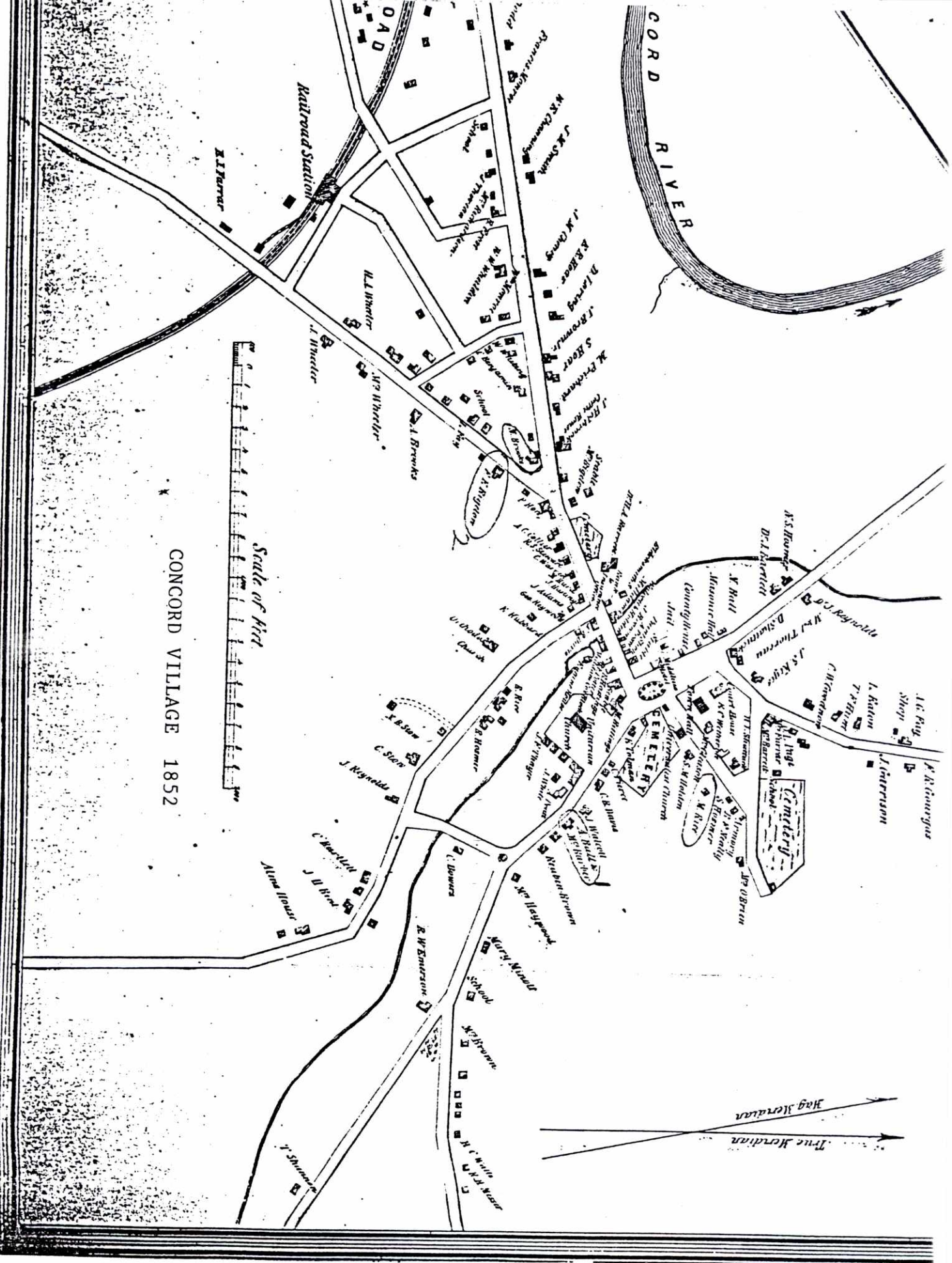


Railroad Station

W. Porter



CONCORD VILLAGE 1852



True Meridian  
Magnetic Meridian

Cemetery

Cemetery

Cemetery

Cemetery

Cemetery

Cemetery

Cemetery

Cemetery



## THE ALCOTTS AND THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The second section of this binder provides an overview of underground railroad activities in Concord both before and after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. It is included in the binder so that the activities of the Alcotts in relation to abolitionism and the underground railroad can be better understood in the contexts of their time and location.

This section uses quotes, mainly from Bronson Alcott's Journals, to show his views on slavery, abolitionism and the family's involvement with the underground railroad at Hillside, as the Alcotts called the Wayside. Although the Alcotts lived at Hillside only from April 1, 1845 until November 17, 1848, the quotes included here are from before, during and after those years. It should be remembered that, when the Alcott Family lived at Hillside, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, which was much stricter and had harsher punishments for those violating it than the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, had not been passed.

One myth connected with the Wayside and fugitive slaves concerns the closet in the East Bedroom. It has been suggested that the closet had been constructed in a manner that allowed for a person, whether a fugitive slave or not, to be concealed. A telephone conversation on February 24, 1997 with Orville Carroll, retired National Park Service architect who oversaw the restoration of the Wayside and was the author of the historic structure report for the Wayside, established that the closet was never built in a fashion that would have allowed it to be used for that purpose.

Carroll asserts that the idea that the East Bedroom closet was used to hide a fugitive slave comes from Margaret Lothrop. In her book, *The Wayside*, on page seventy she discusses the possibility of a hiding place for a fugitive. She states, "They may have utilized the space near the chimney of the southeast bedroom." On page ninety-nine of her book, she explains how Frank B. Sanborn was temporarily hidden at the Wayside and says that "she [Mrs. Mann] may have discovered the space near the chimney of the east bedroom, and gained access to it by removing attic floor boards." Carroll said in his telephone conversation that the area near the chimney would never have been used in the manner Lothrop describes.

Gary Collison in his book, *Shadrack Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen*, discusses such hiding places on page forty-four. He maintains that such places of concealment would have been used in the South and near the border between the South and North. He does not believe that such areas were used in the North. "Farther North, their use would probably have reflected the self-dramatizing romantic urges of their friends than actual necessity." He also notes, "But direct evidence is rare, and the reputation of many a root cellar or concealed closet as a hiding



place for fugitive slaves seems a product of purest imagination."

Based on the information from Orville Carroll and from Collison, it can be concluded that the closet in the East Bedroom was never used to conceal a person. That myth must no longer be included as part of the story of the Wayside.

By the Alcotts own testimony we are certain that they helped fugitive slaves. Look below for the quotes dated January 13, February 2 and February 9, 1847.

The quotes that follow are arranged chronologically. Information in brackets has been added to clarify or expand on an idea.

October 15, 1830

"Heard Mr. Garrison, [William Lloyd who was a leader in the abolitionist movement and in 1831 founded the abolitionist newspaper, the *Liberator*.] whose efforts in the abolition of slavery have been known to the public through 'The Genius of Emancipation,' at the Julien Hall, on this interesting subject. His lecture was full of truth and power. He proposes to give three lectures at the same place. I sent a communication to the *Daily Advertiser* on" [Quote ends in mid sentence in the printed version of Alcott's Journals.]

October 16, 1830

"This, [the communication to the *Daily Advertiser*] I trust, will aid his purposes and the cause of truth and humanity. Heard Mr. Garrison again this evening. This lecture consisted chiefly in a statement of facts concerning the cruelty with which many slaveholders [sic] had treated their slaves at the South. Mr. G lectures very well. There is sometimes a want of discrimination, perhaps, between the slave-holder [sic] who keeps his slaves from motives of expediency and the one whose principles are in favor of slavery."

November 8, 1830

"Evening: Attended a meeting of a few individuals friendly to the abolition of slavery to concert measures for the foundation of an Anti-slavery [sic] Society in this city. Mr. May, Rev. Mr. Collier, Mr. Blanchard, and Mr. Sewall were the persons present. Arrangements were made to have another meeting on Monday, 22nd. ult, and, in the meanwhile, persons who might be thought friendly to the cause made acquainted with the purpose of the meeting. The cause is a good one, and will, I trust, succeed."

May 11, 1846

"Replenished our stores from the grocery in the village. Maple sugar, flour, cheese, &c. We endeavor to use no articles of foreign or slave production in our diet. In apparel we cannot as yet dispense well with cotton and leather, the first a product of slaves and the last an invasion of the rights of animals."

The three quotes that follow show, without doubt, that the Alcotts, while at Hillside, assisted fugitive slaves. Based on the date of Mrs. Alcott's letter and the dates on Bronson Alcott's Journal entries, they may have been discussing two different fugitives. Mrs. Alcott's letter of January 13 says that a fugitive had been with the family for two weeks and then was sent on to Canada. Bronson's Journal entry of February 2 notes the arrival of a fugitive. On February 9 he says that the fugitive had been with the family a week and then was assisted on his way to Canada.

Odell Shepard, the editor of the 1938 edition of the Journals of Bronson Alcott, has a footnote to the February 2 entry where he notes that the "Alcott's house, like many in Concord, was a 'station' on the 'Underground Railroad'." As explained in the second section of this binder, a station was a place where a fugitive slave was sheltered until the fugitive could be safely sent farther north. It also meant that the place was a part of the network called the underground railroad and most likely used more than once. The Alcotts may have assisted many slaves in their years at Hillside. At this point in researching the issue, however, only the three quotes included here clearly document their activities in helping fugitive slaves at Hillside.

January 13, 1847

This quote is from a letter Mrs. Alcott wrote to her brother.

"We have had an interesting fugitive here for 2 weeks--right from Maryland. He was anxious to get to Canada and we have forwarded him the best way we could. His sufferings have been great, his intrepidity unparalleled. He agrees with us about Slave produce--he says it is the only way the Abolition of the Slave can ever be effected. He says it will never be done by insurrection..."

February 2, 1847

"The hunters are astir in these sunny days, and from this my



espial I hear every now and then the bolt dealt sure from the fowler's gun. Man is harried by his propensities. Everywhere in Nature I find the old felon, Murder, dogging Mercy. I cannot step upon my hill-top [sic] or plunge into the pine woods behind my house without encountering this huntsman. I am upon this track, he on mine -- I in quest of my game, he of his. One cannot escape these Nimrods [people expert or devoted to hunting] anywhere.

And now, as if to domesticate this wolf in my fancy, there arrives from the Maryland plantations a fugitive to sit at my table and fireside, whom yet another Nimrod will seize and hurry swiftly into bondage or death if he can."

February 9, 1847

"Our friend the fugitive, who has shared now a week's hospitalities with us, sawing and piling my wood, feels this new taste of freedom yet unsafe here in New England, and so has left us for Canada. We supplied him with the means of journeying, and bade him a good god-speed [sic] to a freer land.

Him pangs of freedom filled with strange surprise,  
And with wild rapture lights his eyes.

He is scarce thirty years of age, athletic, dextrous, [sic] sagacious, and self-relying [sic]. He has many of the elements of the hero. His stay with us has given image and a name to the dire entity of slavery, and was an impressive lesson to my children, bringing before them the wrongs of the black man and his tale of woes."

February 28, 1851

*This quote is from a letter Mrs. Alcott wrote from Boston to her brother, Samuel J. May.*

"I have sent 20 colored women to service in the country--where for the present they will be safe--may yet have to meet the penalties of the law--[1850 Fugitive Slave Law]--I am ready."

*This quote is also from the same letter.*

"Never was a darker day in our Country's history."

March 6, 1851

"Emerson called today. I found him at the American House and

dined with him. He lectured at Syracuse and Rochester lately, and goes to Pittsburg [sic] on the 16 inst. to read some new lectures--one on 'Power,' also on 'Wealth,' 'Culture,' and another on 'Fate.'

E. seemed in better spirits than usual. He had a good deal to say on the times and the spirit of the times. Boston was a base place just now. He was ashamed of it. Elliott, the Senator, deserved insult from every right-minded citizen for his late vote on the Fugitive Slave bill. Southerners were saints compared with him."

April 4, 1851

"Thomas Sims, a colored boy, was last evening arrested by Marshall [sic] Tukey as a fugitive slave, and committed to the Court House [sic] for safe keeping [sic].

There is great excitement in the city. The Court House [sic] is surrounded with chains and armed police to hold the prisoner in safe custody. It is a novel spectacle to our people, and excites the indignation of every one in whom sentiments of justice and humanity yet survive as the safeguards of manliness and of religion. The question 'What has the North to do with slavery?' is visibly answered. Here it is in the Capital and the State has opened its Court of Justice (so called) not to protect and free, but to convict and remand the fugitive, who sought its protection and sympathy, to slavery and all its horrors. A few scenes like this will show us where we are, and settle our destinies.

What is a republic, taking sides against itself? What are citizens who can stand and tamely see themselves insulted; the city police drafted as hounds of the Slave Power, to catch and keep their victims from rescuers? [A clear reaction by Alcott to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law] Such disgrace to the country, to the State, the city, to humanity, to the consciences of freemen, cannot long be borne with, nor silently. Redress in some way, but a redress at any hazard, and a rescue, not of this prisoner perhaps, of one fugitive, or several, but of the consciences and constitution of Massachusetts, the vindication of the rights of freemen.

This afternoon, attended a meeting on the Common called to discuss measures for action relative to this crisis. There was great excitement and earnest speaking. The true feeling pervaded the crowd, and good manners, throughout.--The meeting adjourned to convene at once in the Tremont Temple.

Evening. The Vigilance Committee met at Timothy Gilbert's rooms, Washington Street. I was elected a member of the body. Several gentlemen volunteered to beat the streets for protecting fugitives from being arrested during the night. Traversed the western portion of the city with John N. Spear, and visited the



Watch House in Hanover Street. We met but a single watchman during out walk. Came home a little after midnight."

April 5, 1851

"In Court Square. Sims' trial proceeding before Commissioner Curtis in U. S. Court Room [sic]. At Cornhill with Vigilance Committee. The excitement very great. Court Square filled with people. Had much talk with Channing (W. H.), Pillsbury, and others. The Court adjourned till Monday."

April 7, 1851

"Returned to Boston early this morning and heard Robert Rantoul's argument on the Unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Law, before the Commissioner. It was a sad spectacle. The Commissioner seemed to have made up his mind to face the moral sentiment of the people and carry his point at all costs...I would not have been in his place for whatever the Nation has to give. He will share in the Nation's disgrace, one day."

April 8, 1851

"Today and this evening at a meeting of the people in the Tremont Temple. The speeches earnest, humane, eloquent, and every way creditable to Massachusetts and liberty. Horace Mann Chairman of the meeting. Pierrepont, Palfry, and S. C. Phillips, W. H. Channing and Wendell Phillips in the evening, acquitted themselves nobly. Such vials of wrath as were poured and dashed indignantly on Webster [Before becoming Secretary of State, Daniel Webster had been a senator from Massachusetts and had collaborated in the passage of the 1850 Compromise of which the Fugitive Slave Law was a part. Webster supported the Compromise because he feared that without it the unity of the nation would be threatened. He was severely criticized by abolitionists for his action.] and the abettors of the Fugitive Slave Law! There was no mercy for the recreant statesman, no shield from the moral indignation of freemen whose trust he had betrayed."

April 10, 1851

"Heard Parker discourse this morning for a couple of hours and more on the sins of the nation in general and of the city in particular. The house was crowded, and his auditors would have listened unweariedly to declamation for another hour..."

It was truly Roman, the spectacle. Victim after victim he cast grimly into the amphitheater, to be devoured without mercy-- President, Secretary, Senators, Marshalls [sic] Sheriffs, Mayor, hunkers, the poor Commissioner Curtis. Such ignominy as he cast upon him and his kidnappers--scourging them, the city, the Nation! It was frightful. I commended his discretion in advising the women and children to bear with him and not scream as he called forth his spectres."

April 11, 1851

"Today at Tremont Temple; at Anti-slavery [sic] Office in Cornhill; in Court Square, which was thronged with people, many from the country, and all awaiting Judge Woodbury's decision of Sims' fate--some to see the fugitive taken from the Court House [sic] and many to seize the moment for his rescue from the Marshall's [sic] custody.

Evening: at Washington Hall, where Garrison, Pillsbury, Wilson of the Senate, and others, made speeches. I left the Hall at midnight."

April 12, 1851

"Walked with my wife to Court Square, and found that Sims had been taken away just before our arrival." [Thomas Sims was returned to slavery.]

April 15, 1851

"Sims' catching, keeping, and extradition cost Boston City three thousand dollars, it seems, or nearly that sum. It would be a handsome piece of honor and justice to withhold the payment of the assessment for this item of the tax-bill when it shall be claimed by the municipality, and take a freeman's place within the House of Leverett Street if it should be carried so far. I am tempted to try it. Certainly the prison could not be put to better use than the holding of honest men, to the discredit of unrighteous laws.

I had fancied till now that certain beautiful properties were mine by culture and the time and place I live in, if not by inheritance--namely, a City, Civilization, Christianity, and a Country."



April 20, 1851

"But bad laws are good things--profitable at least by proxy and consequence. So the Nation is debtor, it knows not yet how deeply, in the intelligence and the sentiments, to the discipline which this draconian schoolmaster, the Slave Law, and the events coming fast on its heels, are giving us--putting questions and torturing replies that never the Adversary had dared to thrust otherwise upon a people civilized and in some sort Christianized before. The lesson is likely to be learned and remembered."

April 22, 1851

"Theodore Parker told me today that he had given a month's time and more to this fugitive business, besides a thousand dollars. Moreover, had harbored a parishioner of his, a colored man and fugitive, at his house, during the recent excitement, to shield him from the law's clutch. And Christian Dr. G. of Federal Street Church has denounced him as a traitor and infidel for his humanity.

Parker is most intrepid in his hostility to this infamous Bill, and report has it that he keeps pistols ready for service in his study. Lately he married William and Ellen Crofts [Most references to this couple call them Craft. They were a fugitive slave couple who had escaped from the South in 1848 and finally settled in Boston where they were activists in the African-American community. Their freedom was threatened by the new fugitive slave law.] when they were about escaping from the city, by George Thompson's and the Abolitionists' countenance, for safety in England; and 'tis said that Parker gave to Ellen a Bible and to William a brace of pistols, with the expressed hope that both would use them as occasion offered."

April 26, 1851

"Left for Concord, to see to the transplanting of the apple-trees [sic] at 'Hillside' and to spend the Sunday with Emerson. Found E. at work on Miss Fuller's Memoir, which he has undertaken to compile and have ready for the press by September. W. H. Channing is preparing his memoir also of Margaret, and the two are to be bound in the same covers. So we shall have the best that can be gathered now of this great woman. There is hope, too, of Samuel Ward's tribute to her memory being given in the same work.

Emerson is asked to read a paper on 'The Fugitive Slave Law' to his townspeople, and intends doing so on Sunday evening next. His opinions will go to swell the tide of detestation which is

overwhelming that odious statute and all those who uphold it.

Evening: We have had the Conversation on Webster, Union, Disunion, the Vigilance Committee, and the slave-hunters' work here in Boston."

The quotes from 1854 and 1874, that follow, all pertain to the Anthony Burns' case. Burns was a fugitive slave who had been arrested and imprisoned in Boston. Bronson Alcott enlisted the aid of Thomas Wentworth Higginson to help in rescuing Burns. They attended a meeting in Boston of the Vigilance Committee which discussed the issue. A smaller group was formed of those willing to use force to rescue Burns. Alcott and Higginson were part of the smaller group.

Higginson and Martin Stowell, who had participated in a rescue of a fugitive slave in New York, developed a plan on how to execute the rescue. A large protest meeting was to be held. The plan called for a small group to storm the Courthouse where Burns was held, and those at the protest meeting would then arrive at the Courthouse as reinforcements.

During the assault on the Courthouse, Higginson and an African-American man led the way with a battering ram to breach the door. When the door partially opened, the African American went in, followed by Higginson. Lewis Hayden, a leader among Boston African Americans who had helped rescue Shadrack Minkins, was behind Higginson. They were clubbed by several policemen immediately after entering the building. A shot was fired through the door, and a policeman named Batchelder was killed.

The shot frightened the crowd, and those already in the Courthouse were pushed out of it. Due to bad communication, those attending the protest meeting did not arrive in time to assist the small group. Higginson was again outside of the Courthouse but tried to remain near the door in case another attempt to get in was made.

He remembers that "In the silent pause that ensued there came quietly forth from the crowd the well-known form of Mr. Amos Bronson Alcott, the Transcendental philosopher. Ascending the lighted steps alone, he said tranquilly, turning to me and pointing forward, 'Why are we not within?' 'Because,' was the rather impatient answer, 'these people will not stand by us.' He said not a word, but calmly walked up the steps, --he and his familiar cane. He paused again at the top, the centre of all eyes, within and without; a revolver sounded from within, but hit nobody; and finding himself wholly unsupported, he turned and retreated, but without hastening a step." (See Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays*, pages 147-162 for a complete description of the attempt to free Anthony Burns.)

The attempt to rescue Anthony Burns failed, and he was returned to slavery. Bronson Alcott only recorded the event in his



Journal twenty years after it had happened, and then only as it had been told to him by someone else.

May 26, 1854

"I return by early train this morning and meet the Vigilance Committee concerning Burns' rescue and measures for this exigency. A full attendance, and many opinions expressed.

Evening; I am at Faneuil Hall. The meeting is large and the speeches very exciting. Phillips and Parker acquit themselves manfully. The meeting is adjourned in prospect of Burns' rescue. I return by Court Square, where I meet Higginson and witness some incidents of the unsuccessful attempt at the rescue." [It is interesting that Alcott recorded no details of the attempt to rescue Burns and does not mention his own involvement.]

May 27, 1854

"All day about Court Square, in court, in counsel with Vigilance Committee; the crowd very large, and much excitement prevails in all classes."

May 29, 1854

"About Court Square, and with Vigilance Committee at Tremont Temple. The trial proceeds, and the crowd is large and clamorous for the issues of the case."

May 30, 1854 .

"In Court Square today, at Anti-Slavery [sic] meeting in Melodeon. Also meet Vigilance Committee. The country all in town."

May 31. 1854

"Again in court, and at Anti-Slavery [sic] meeting."

June 1, 1854

"Today about Court Square."

June 2, 1854

"Witness Burns' rendition today sadly, and ashamed of the Union, of New England, of Boston, almost of myself too. I must see to it that my part is done hereafter to give us a Boston, a Mayor, a Governor, and a President--if indeed a single suffrage, or many, can mend matters essentially. So I shall vote, as I have never done hitherto, for a municipal government and a state. Possibly a country may yet be rescued from slavery...Yet something besides voting must do it effectually."

February 9, 1874

"Walking with Sanborn this forenoon, we met Louis Hayden [He was a leader in the Boston African-American community who had helped rescue Shadrack Minkins and had assisted in the attempt to rescue Anthony Burns.] near the State House (he is now messenger of the General court) and I asked him to relate the particulars of what he saw of my part in the attempted rescue of Sims [Alcott has confused the Sims' case with the Anthony Burns' case. See explanation above concerning the Burns' case.] in Court Square.

He says that he saw me come up the Square from Court Street, approach the western door, pause there a moment and survey the beam of timber that had been used for breaking through the door, then ascend the steps and enter, glance up the stairway leading to the room above where Sims [Burns] was confined, then retreat slowly and cross the Square and accost Higginson, who was standing aloof and alone at a little distance from the door. He did not hear what passed between us. The crowd then rushing up the Square from the Faneuil Hall meeting and the city police marching in directly after it, he lost sight of me. Bachelder, [sic] he says, had been shot only a few minutes, and on the spot where I had stood at the foot of the stairs. I was the first to enter inside the courthouse door, and had I been a few moments earlier might have been shot also, as the bullets had been flying over the balusters down to the entry and into it from the assailants outside.

He does not tell me about his part in this assault, nor that of his colleagues, though it has been rumored that he shot Bachelder [sic] and possibly wounded Higginson in the melee at the door. Nor have I spoken with Higginson about the matter since the event. On accosting him at the time in the Square, I said 'Why are we not inside instead of being here?' And he replied, 'Because there are none here to accompany us!'--and we separated, the police appearing and the crowd dispersing as the former marched round the Court House [sic].

I had an obscure instinct stirring within me that to die was about the best use that could be made of a freeman at that crisis, and felt that the wrong man had fallen on the wrong side.



Had the victim been one of us, the sad fortunes of that day and of the country afterwards might have been less disastrous. It seemed the moment for a sacrifice to be laid on the altar for the rights of freemen and the salvation of the Republic. And I felt, I remember, ashamed to return, erect and breathing, to my house, as I had left it. Moreover, I restrained myself with difficulty from rushing into the phalanx as it marched its prisoner down State Street, hoping thus to provoke a movement that might set the indignant citizens, standing on the pavements and watching the spectacle, upon the bayoneted platoons, and rescue the slave from being returned to his doom. An innocent victim or two then falling might have spared the bloodshed and woes that followed.

But the nobler deed was reserved for the nobler victim, the hero of Harper's [sic] Ferry, [Alcott is referring to John Brown] and, the sacrifice completed, the slave and the Republic were freed. But our city would gladly blot from its annals the degradation and disgrace of that doleful day."

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