

# The Underground Railroad

## Explorer's Map & Guide



Come Share  
Our Heritage!

This map and guide will take you on a journey to the past, a time prior to the Civil War when all men were *created* equal but not *treated* equally. This is the story of the Underground Railroad, the avenue to liberty that many enslaved people took to experience life as free men and women. The story of the Underground Railroad will never be completely told, however, because it was a secretive and dangerous enterprise. Much documentation relating to it has been destroyed, along with the physical evidence of the fugitive slaves' plight. But the story continues to unfold as the years pass. The accounts described here have been soundly researched, but they are only as accurate as the information that is currently available. As ongoing study unveils more details, the stories will become richer, and so will the lives of those who cherish them.

### Timeline

- 1726 The first slaves arrive in Lancaster County.
- 1793 The first Fugitive Slave Law is passed by Congress to help Southern slaveholders to retrieve fugitive slaves. The statute allowed Southern slave owners to recapture runaway slaves, but did not require federal marshals to assist owners and did not empower judges to issue warrants of arrest.

...And it is further agreed between the parties aforesaid, that neither shall entertain, or give countenance to, the enemies of the other, or protect, in their respective states, criminal fugitives, servants, or slaves, but the same to apprehend and secure, and deliver to the state or states, to which such enemies, criminals, servants, or slaves, respectively belong.

- 1804 The first documented Underground Railroad activity begins in Lancaster County as William Wright begins transporting fugitive slaves across the Susquehanna River and through Lancaster County using various disguises and ruses.

- 1834-1835 The Columbia Race Riots erupt as the result of dissatisfaction over the entrepreneurial success of Stephen Smith, an African-American resident.

- 1838 Under the new Pennsylvania Constitution, free blacks lose their right to vote:

Article III, Section I. In elections by the citizens, every white freeman of the age of twenty-one years... shall enjoy the rights of an elector.

- 1850 As a result of a new Fugitive Slave Law, federal marshals were enjoined to help recapture slaves, under the penalty of a \$1000 fine for dereliction. If a runaway escaped while in a marshal's custody, the marshal had to forfeit the slave's full value to the owner. Persons guilty of abetting slaves' escape were subject to fine and a maximum prison sentence of six months. As in Southern courts, slaves could not testify against whites, but a master's circumstantial evidence was easily admissible. Federal commissioners received \$5 for pro-slave verdicts, \$10 for decisions favorable to masters. If warranted by a threat of interference, federal officers were authorized to accompany the slave out of the area of risk.

Section 6. And be it further enacted, That when a person held to service or labor in any State or Territory of the United States, has heretofore or shall hereafter escape into another State or Territory of the United States, the person or persons to whom such service or labor may be due, or his, her, or their agent or attorney, duly authorized, by power of attorney, in writing, acknowledged and certified under the seal of some legal officer or court of the State or Territory in which the same may be executed, may pursue and reclaim such fugitive person, either by procuring warrant...or by seizing and arresting such fugitive, where the same can be done without process....

- 1851 The Christiana Resistance (sometimes called the Christiana Riot) takes place. This event is considered to be one of the opening salvos of the Civil War.

- 1861 The American Civil War begins.

- 1863 Following the Emancipation Proclamation, blacks join Union forces, despite protest from the white population.

- 1865 The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishes slavery:

Section I. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

- 1870 After almost a year of debate in Congress, African-Americans become United States citizens for the first time.

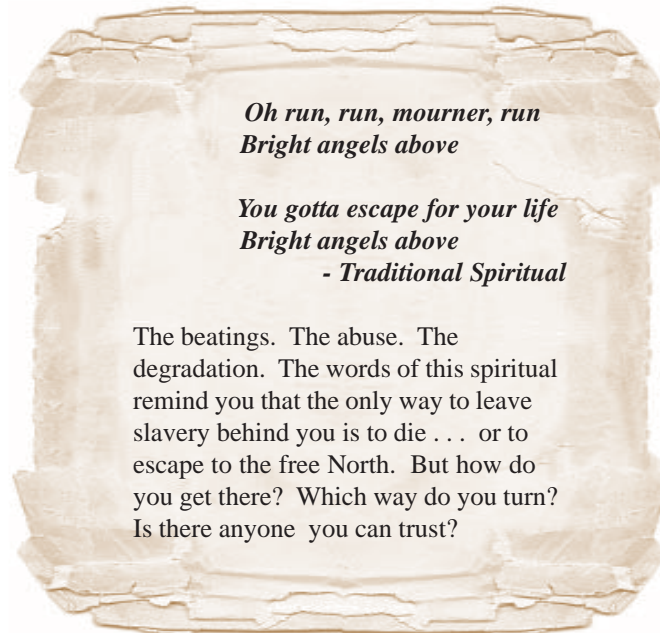


Lancaster County Heritage is a partnership between the County of Lancaster, the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County, and the Pennsylvania Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau. Created in 1998, the goals of Lancaster County Heritage are (1) to enhance community pride in local Heritage Resources while providing desirable economic opportunities and benefits, and (2) to provide a diversity of authentic heritage experiences for both residents and visitors.

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*Oh run, run, mourner, run  
Bright angels above*

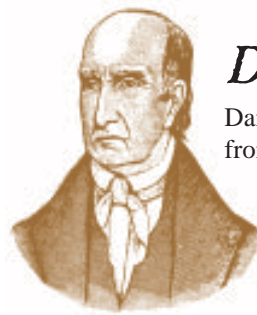
*You gotta escape for your life  
Bright angels above  
- Traditional Spiritual*

The beatings. The abuse. The degradation. The words of this spiritual remind you that the only way to leave slavery behind you is to die . . . or to escape to the free North. But how do you get there? Which way do you turn? Is there anyone you can trust?

As many as 50,000 to 100,000 men and women escaped to freedom using the Underground Railroad network, but the exact number will never be known — many of the ledgers documenting their flight were destroyed. Oral histories and some records did survive, however, and these are enough to give us an idea of how slaves made their way north. Songs like *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, *Brother Moses Gone to de Promised Land*, *Wade In The Water* and *Follow the Drinkin' Gourd* served as directions for fugitives to follow. Using ingenious disguises and creative ploys (like one slave who mailed himself to freedom or others who hid in the false bottoms of wagons), slaves made their way out of bondage. Yet no story of the Underground Railroad would be complete without mention of the men and women who acted as “conductors” and “stationmasters” along the pathway to freedom.

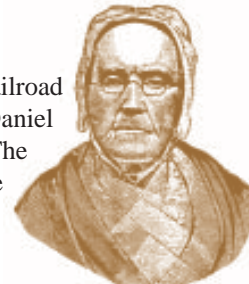
## The People

The Underground Railroad was neither hewn of lumber nor wrought of steel; rather, people made up the ties and rails of liberty, — people who risked their lives, property, and freedom to defeat the inhuman institution of slavery. The following are just a few of the many individuals who worked tirelessly as conductors and stationmasters on the Underground Railroad in Lancaster County. They guided, protected, and cleverly concealed escaping slaves under featherbeds and in wagons, storage sheds, secret passages, and a variety of other hiding places.



### Daniel & Hannah Gibbons (1775 - 1853)

Daniel and Hannah Gibbons, a devout Quaker couple, played a pivotal role in the Underground Railroad from their farm near the village of Bird-in-Hand, in eastern Lancaster County. For over 50 years, Daniel Gibbons aided as many as 1,000 fugitives by providing them with shelter and new identities. The Gibbonses kept detailed documentation of their work until the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. As a result of this law, the Gibbonses destroyed their records.



### William Parker (born 1822)

William Parker was an important figure in the history of the Underground Railroad in Lancaster County. Born a slave in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, he escaped slavery as a young man and used his intellect and imposing presence to defend the freedom of fugitives. He settled in Christiana and used his home as a safehouse on the Underground Railroad. Like his longtime friend Frederick Douglass, Parker spoke passionately against slavery and created a self-defense group to protect freed men and women from being kidnapped by Southern bounty hunters or the Gap Gang, a notorious group of slave catchers who kidnapped escaped slaves and returned them for a reward.

Parker was a prime figure in the Christiana Resistance, because he refused to turn over several escaped slaves to a Maryland slave owner. The melee is regarded as one of the first battles of the Civil War, because the incident was an overt act of civil disobedience against the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Parker fled the Christiana area, but continued to be a stalwart defender of freedom. He later moved to Canada, where he settled in North Buxton, Ontario, a community of runaway slaves. He spent his remaining years there, writing and speaking.

### William Whipper (1804 - 1876)

William Whipper, a cousin and close friend of Stephen Smith, was born on February 22, 1804 in Little Britain Township, Lancaster County. Little is known about his youth, but by 1828 he was residing in Philadelphia and was already known for his role as an intellectual within the free black community. In addition to being the editor of the *National Reformer*, the first African-American magazine, Whipper was among the founders of the Philadelphia Library for Colored Persons.

In 1847, Whipper bought a home on Front Street in Columbia, and accumulated several business holdings in Lancaster County. Upon Stephen Smith's departure from Columbia, Whipper became a leading African-American in the area and became a “stationmaster” along the pathway to freedom, aiding hundreds of fugitive slaves and contributing financially to various causes.

Whipper died in Philadelphia after a long and active life as a venerated elder statesman of the African-American community. His work for freedom and equality can best be summed up in his quote, “(m)y country is the world and my countrymen are all mankind.”

### The African Methodist Episcopal Church

(Established 1787)

Members of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church, which traces its roots to the Methodist Episcopal Church, were tireless in their efforts to secure liberty for the enslaved, risking their own lives and freedom in the process. The church's founders, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, adhered to a belief in “racial solidarity and abolitionist activity.” Lancaster Bethel A.M.E. Church, the third congregation formed under this denomination, shared Allen's and Jones' vision. Several members of the Lancaster congregation, including Reverend Robert Boston, Reverend Thomas Henry, and Joshua P. B. Eddy, were actively involved in the Underground Railroad.

### CREDITS/REFERENCES

The following individuals and organizations were instrumental in the final review and development of this guide: Dr. Louise Barnett, Cliff Edmond, Hillary Green, Dr. Leroy Hopkins, V. Funmi Kennedy, Dr. Shirley Turpin Parham, Bud Rettew, Gwendolyn Winfree, the Lancaster County African-American History Roundtable, and the Lancaster County Historical Society.

Photos: Zercher's Hotel and Parker Residence by Bud Rettew; Scholastic Inc. and Susquehanna River by Lynn M. Stiles; Lancaster County Planning Commission

Recommended reading: Margaret Hope Bacon, *Rebellion at Christiana*; Charles Blockson, *The Hippocrene Guide to the Underground Railroad*; Jim Haskins, *Get on Board - The Story of the Underground Railroad*; Thomas P. Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North*, *Bibliography of African-American Resources in the collection of the Lancaster County Historical Society* (<http://lanclio.org>).

Brochure design: Lynn M. Stiles, Lancaster County Planning Commission

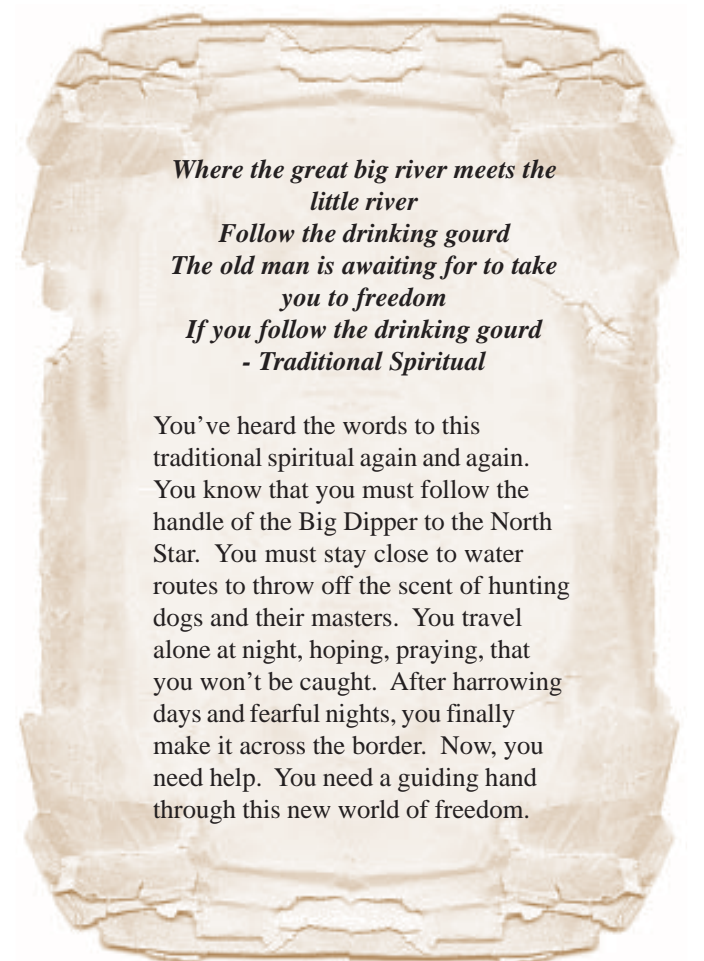
## Background

For thousands of men and women fleeing the oppression of slavery, the Underground Railroad became their lifeline, their passage to freedom. Known alternatively as the Freedom Line, the Lightning Train, the Freedom Train, Mysterious Tracks, or the Trackless Train, the Underground Railroad wasn't a system of rails or trains but a loose organization of freed slaves and abolitionists — *people* — who harbored fugitives often at great peril to themselves. The federal Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 made the assisting of fugitives a crime, and anti-abolitionist sentiment made life unsafe for freed blacks and white sympathizers alike. The entire movement was shrouded in mystery, but the place of its birth has been alternately placed in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Even the origin of the term “Underground Railroad” is much disputed. Some sources indicate that as slave catchers came north, their quarry seemed to disappear underground and the term “Underground Railroad” was born.

The road to freedom *was* paved — paved with acts of heroism and courage. Three of these hard-made paths made their way through Lancaster County. The county's location along the Mason-Dixon line, its residents' devotion to freedom, and its proximity to other free Northern states made it ideal as a pathway to freedom. Some fugitives made their way to Columbia, others crossed the Susquehanna River into Southern Lancaster County at Peach Bottom, and still others followed a path that led them along the Octoraro Creek in the eastern portion of the county. Regardless the path, their destination was often Christiana and, eventually, Philadelphia or Canada.



Susquehanna River



*Where the great big river meets the  
little river  
Follow the drinking gourd  
The old man is awaiting for to take  
you to freedom  
If you follow the drinking gourd  
- Traditional Spiritual*

You've heard the words to this traditional spiritual again and again. You know that you must follow the handle of the Big Dipper to the North Star. You must stay close to water routes to throw off the scent of hunting dogs and their masters. You travel alone at night, hoping, praying, that you won't be caught. After harrowing days and fearful nights, you finally make it across the border. Now, you need help. You need a guiding hand through this new world of freedom.

### Stephen Smith (1795 - 1873)

Stephen Smith, a black man, began life in Columbia as an indentured servant. He was later sold to Columbia's Thomas Boude. In response, Smith's mother who was owned by another family in Dauphin County, escaped to be with her son. The owner of Smith's mother came to Columbia to reclaim her property, but neighbors rushed to Smith's aid. The actions of the owner so enraged the community, that residents intensified their antislavery efforts.

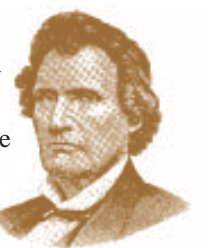
Upon his twenty-first birthday, Stephen Smith bought his freedom for fifty dollars. By that time, he had become the manager of Boude's lumber yard. Once he was freed, he turned his efforts to developing his own lumber and real estate businesses, and ultimately became a leading entrepreneur in Columbia.

In addition to his success in business, Smith also aided fugitives, lectured against slavery, and contributed financially to fugitive activities. His economic means and antislavery sentiments did not go unnoticed, and he became the target of race riots in 1834-1835. In 1838, Smith was ordained as an African Methodist Episcopal minister in Columbia. He left Columbia for Philadelphia, but not without leaving his mark as a businessman and humanitarian.



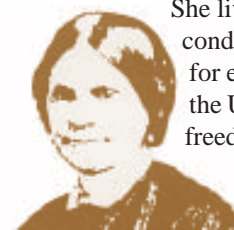
### Thaddeus Stevens (1792 - 1868)

Thaddeus Stevens was an attorney who settled in Lancaster City in 1842 and operated a law office at 47-49 South Queen Street. As an abolitionist, he financed a spy network to infiltrate slaveholder groups that tracked fugitive slaves. Stevens headed the defense team that successfully represented the men charged with treason after the Christiana Resistance (see the other side of this brochure).



### Lydia Hamilton Smith (1813 - 1884)

Smith, a mulatto woman, became Thaddeus Stevens' housekeeper after the death of her husband. She lived in a small house at the rear of Stevens' property, where she worked as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. After the Civil War, she continued her fight for equality by encouraging Stevens' efforts to ratify the 14th and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, which ultimately extended the full rights of citizenship to newly freed blacks.



Zercher's Hotel and Tavern

William Parker Residence - Christiana Resistance Site

# The Underground Railroad

## Explorer's Map & Guide



Lancaster County,  
Pennsylvania

*No more auction block for me  
No more, no more  
No more auction block for me  
Many thousand gone  
- Traditional Spiritual*

You're near your goal of freedom. You've made contact with "conductors" who will guide you through the communities that are relatively safe for runaway slaves as you move along the Underground Railroad network. You look around and find yourself surrounded by a community of successful black men and women and white abolitionists who encourage you on your journey to freedom.

## The Places and Events

### Columbia

Columbia, situated on the Susquehanna River across from York and near the Maryland border, was ideally located as a stop on the Underground Railroad. Its industrious and burgeoning free black population also made the town an excellent place for escaping slaves to blend in with the community. Prominent black businessmen like William Whipper and Stephen Smith and white abolitionists like William Wright provided rest and transportation along the pathway to freedom. In fact, William Wright donated a tract of land in Columbia to its African-American residents. The area, known as Tow Hill, became a center of Underground Railroad activity.

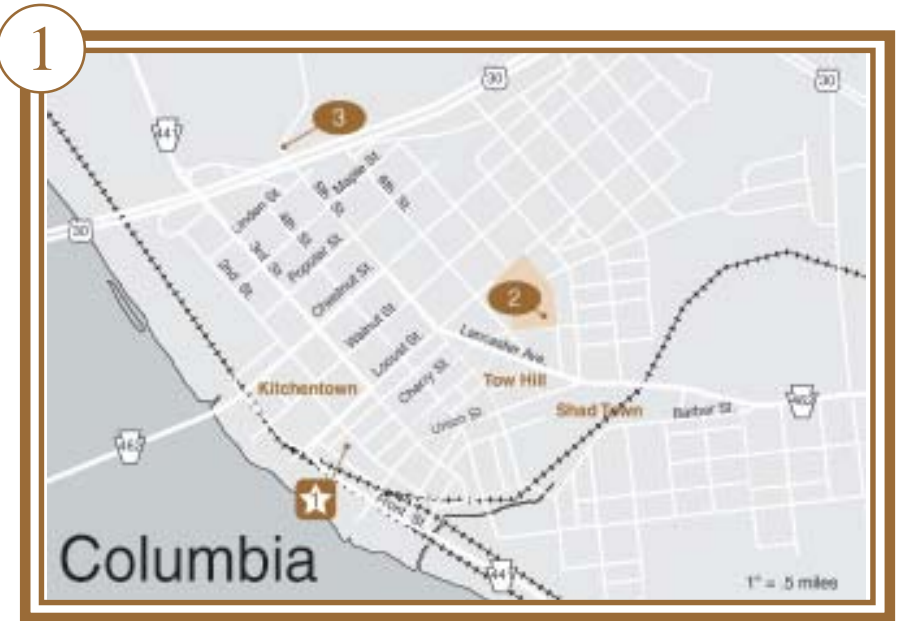
But as activity increased and free blacks became more prosperous, Columbia suffered as a result of hostilities between the races. The Columbia Race Riots of 1834 and 1835 give some sense of how difficult race relations were, even in the free North. As fugitives continued to settle in the area, their numbers began to swell. The labor class and newly wealthy whites believed that their economic opportunities were being threatened by the increasing prosperity of free blacks. Influenced by race riots in Philadelphia and other large cities, Columbia's white residents erupted in violence. White mobs beat several black men, terrorized families, and destroyed their homes. Although four white men were brought to trial, they were acquitted and released without paying restitution. The black community came to understand that it was not going to be protected by the laws of white citizens, and black vigilance groups, like William Parker's, emerged to protect the rights of African-Americans.

**1** **Wright's Ferry Mansion**  
38 South 2nd Street, Columbia, 717-684-4325  
Open May-Oct: Tue-Wed and Fri-Sat, 10 am-3 pm. Last tour starts at 3 pm. \$

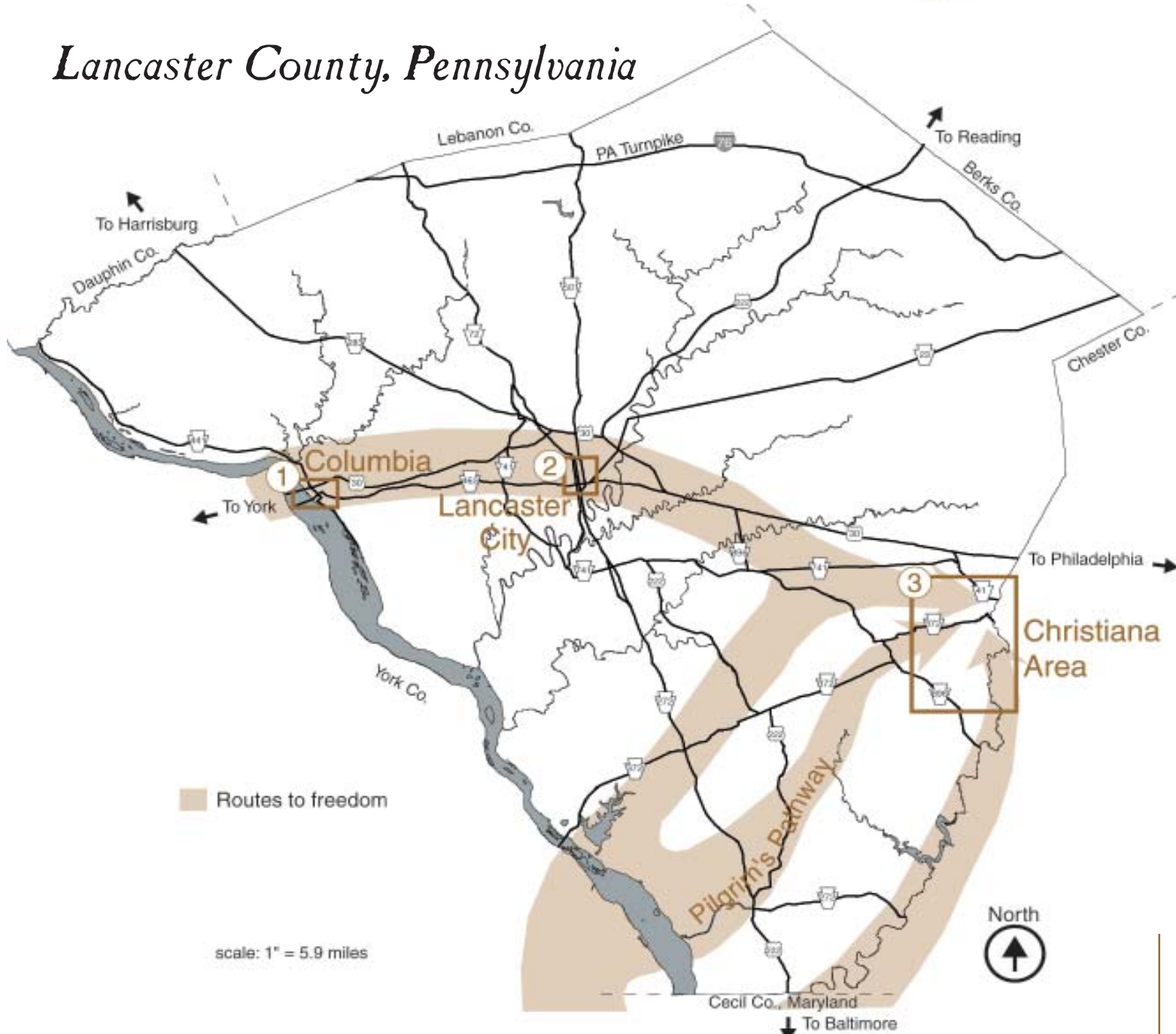
William Wright became a conductor on the Underground Railroad as early as 1804. He worked to secure the release of captured slaves and assisted in their escape to freedom by sending them along the underground network in disguise or hidden in false-bottom wagons.

**2** **Mt. Bethel Cemetery (Potter's Field)**  
Corner of Bethel and Cherry Streets, Columbia  
This corner portion of the cemetery was reserved for the burial of African-Americans who lived in the Columbia area, many of whom served in the Civil War. The Catholics, Mennonites, and Moravians all had separate burial grounds for blacks.

**3** **Zion Hill Cemetery**  
Corner of 5th Street and Chiques Hill Road, Columbia  
This once-neglected cemetery is the burial site of many soldiers who fought with the Black Company from Columbia. Together with white forces from Lancaster, the Company fought against Confederate troops advancing along the Wrightsville-Columbia Bridge. Among those buried there is Robert Loney (Loo-nee), a black man who fought in the Civil War and whose family was among the first groups of slaves freed in the early 1800s. Robert Loney worked with William Wright as a conductor on the Underground Railroad. One of his primary responsibilities was ferrying people across the Susquehanna River.



### Lancaster County, Pennsylvania



**The Pilgrim's Pathway**  
This descriptive title was given to one of the earliest escape corridors into Lancaster County by those coming north along the Susquehanna River. At Peach Bottom, the St. Peter's Creek empties into the river. Fugitive slaves followed the creek inland for several miles through dark, lonely ravines. They then left this creek and traveled overland, following farm roads. Because they were highly visible, night travel was almost a necessity. A second stream guided them to the safe houses and hideouts along the route to Eastern Lancaster County, Christiana, and eventual freedom. One of these roads retains the name "Pilgrim's Pathway."

**Legend**  
★ **Lancaster County Heritage Resource** (Sites with this designation meet the authenticity guidelines and criteria of Lancaster County Heritage.)  
● **Other Underground Railroad Site**

### Lancaster City

Like Columbia, Lancaster had a large black population and a number of white residents who supported the abolitionist cause. The city was home to slave self-protection groups and refugee societies that protected fugitives from masters or their agents. Lydia Hamilton Smith, Thaddeus Stevens, and Bethel A. M. E. Church provided assistance on the Underground Railroad by sending fugitives to larger American cities like Philadelphia, or even further, to Canada.

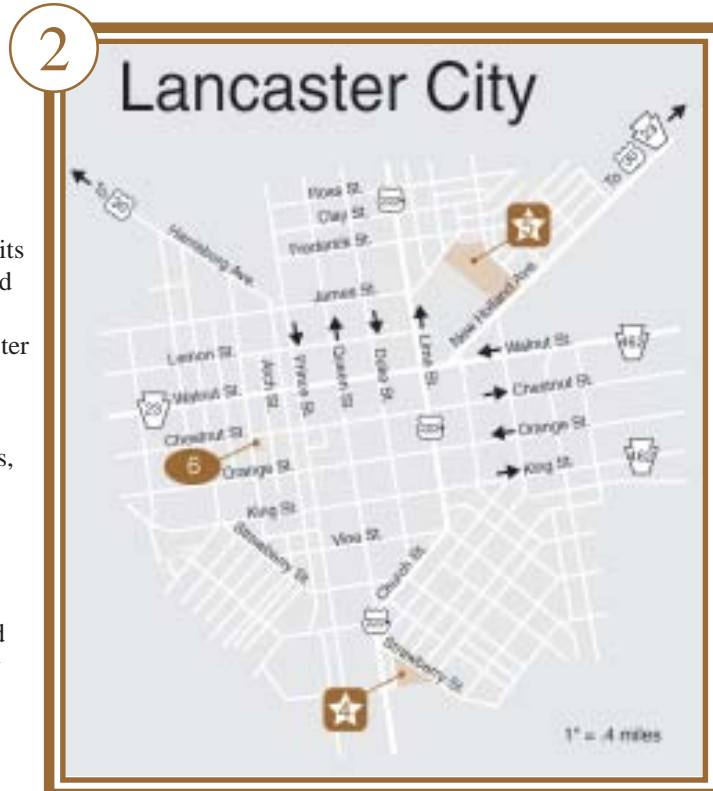
**4** **Bethel A.M.E. Church**  
415 East Strawberry Street, Lancaster, 717-396-8381  
The African Methodist Episcopal Church was active in the aid of fugitives throughout the North and the Lancaster Bethel A.M.E., founded in 1817, was no exception. Because of the work of two of its early ministers, Joshua P. Eddy and Robert Boston, the church served as a station on the Underground Railroad as well as the center of spiritual renewal for free African-Americans who lived in the Lancaster community.

**Bethel A.M.E. Cemetery (burials from 1817 - 1906)**  
Adjacent to the church is the resting place of soldiers, church pastors, and parishioners.

**Living the Experience**  
At Bethel A.M.E. Church, 717-396-8381  
Mar-Dec: scheduled, historical re-enactment performance with traditional dinner. Advanced registration is requested, individual and group rates are available. This performance is an interactive journey back to the time of the Underground Railroad.

**5** **St. Mary's Cemetery**  
Between Park and New Holland Avenues, Lancaster  
Lydia Hamilton Smith, a conductor on the Underground Railroad and confidante of Thaddeus Stevens, is buried here.

**6** **Shreiner's Cemetery**  
Corner of Chestnut and Mulberry Streets, Lancaster  
This is the burial site of Thaddeus Stevens, a tireless advocate for the rights of African-Americans, both as an abolitionist and as a legislator. He worked for the passage of the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and fought for African-Americans' right to vote.



### The Christiana Resistance

Many historians consider the Christiana Resistance to be the first battle of the Civil War, for it was here that the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 was tested for the first time. Southern slaveholders believed that the federal law protected their right to apprehend fugitives; Northern abolitionists denounced the law and denied that the federal government had the right to enact a bill that ran contrary to human rights and the laws of God. A confrontation between the sides was inevitable; their opposing philosophies met at Christiana.

Edward Gorsuch, a wealthy land owner from Baltimore County, Maryland, discovered that grain and other items from his farm were missing, along with four of his slaves. With the law on his side, he set out to reclaim his property. Accompanied by a group of men, Gorsuch made his way to Christiana where an informant had told him he would find his runaways.

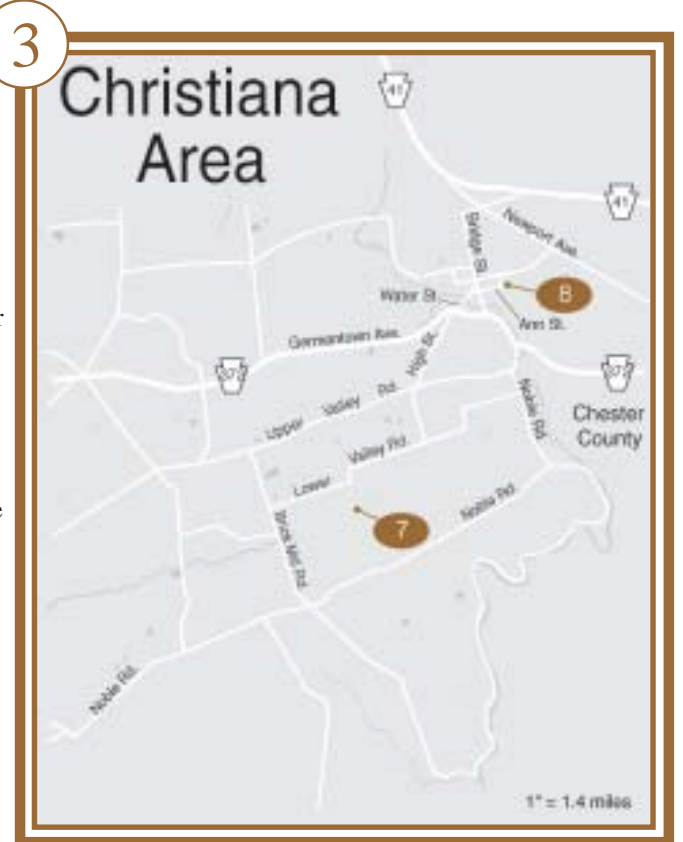
The four escaped slaves had indeed made their way to William Parker's home in Christiana. Parker was a fugitive who had established residence on the farm of Quaker Levi Pownall. Parker was a strong defender of fugitives and was known for his assistance to those who were traveling along the Underground Railroad.

On the morning of September 11, 1851, Gorsuch and his group made their way through cornfields to Parker's tenant house on the Pownall farm. A marshal announced the group's intention of apprehending Edward Gorsuch's property. The inhabitants of the house denied that any property belonging to Gorsuch was on the premises. Shots were fired by both sides. Eliza Parker, William Parker's wife, sounded a horn for help, and between 75 and 100 people came to the assistance of those inside the little homestead. By the end of the encounter, Edward Gorsuch lay dead and his son lay seriously wounded.

Federal troops were called in to help with the ensuing investigation. Forty-five United States Marines descended on Christiana. With a posse of fifty civilians, they searched and terrorized the white and black citizens of the community. As a result of the investigation, 37 men were arrested and charged with treason for their defiance of a federal order. Heading the defense team was abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens. After three months of testimony, the jury returned a verdict of "not guilty" in fifteen minutes. The verdict sent a signal to the South that the Fugitive Slave Law would not be enforced in the North and further fanned the flames of distrust and discord that were spreading throughout the country.

**7** **Site of the Christiana Resistance**  
Southwest of Christiana, near Lower Valley Road  
William Parker's home on the farm of Levi Pownall was the site of a flurry of Underground Railroad activity and a scene of turmoil. Although the house itself no longer stands, a Pennsylvania Historical Marker across from the house site silently tells the story.

**8** **Zercher's Hotel and Tavern**  
Intersection of Green, Ann, and Branch Streets, Christiana  
At the conclusion of the Christiana Resistance, Edward Gorsuch's body was brought to Frederick Zercher's Hotel (now the Charles Bond Company), which became the headquarters for the subsequent inquest. A monument commemorating the event with the names of those tried for treason stands across from the site.



*Dark and thorny is the pathway  
Where the Pilgrim makes his way  
- Spiritual by Harriet Tubman*  
You have finally found freedom following the path of the Underground Railroad. It was a treacherous journey that you and thousands of other brave souls took. But as you look back, you know that the success of the Underground Railroad could never be measured by numbers. It must be measured by its effect on a nation. The people, both black and white, who helped you, committed an act of civil disobedience and open resistance to the spiteful Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 that helped to bring about the Civil War and ultimately, an end to slavery.