

The River-to-Lake Freedom Trail

“The Underground Railroad was neither underground, nor a railroad, but a system of loosely connected safe havens where those escaping the brutal conditions of slavery were sheltered, fed, clothed . . . and instructed during their journey to freedom.” Thus begins the text born by each marker placed along the River-To-Lake Freedom Trail in Ohio to memorialize one of the most frequently-used corridors of the Underground Railroad (UGRR).

Ohio had an extensive network of trails used by anti-slavery activists, free Blacks and churches to help fugitive slaves flee from the South to Canada. Ohio had one of the most active UGRR operations in the nation; some sources estimate that 40,000 slaves escaped to freedom through Ohio.

In the year 2000, U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater bestowed a federal “Millennial Trails” designation on Ohio’s network of escape routes for runaway slaves. The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) took the designation one step further, designating portions of U.S. Route 23 and State Route 4—one of the most frequently used corridors on the

Underground Railroad—as a commemorative highway to be known as River-To-Lake Freedom Trail.

The River-To-Lake Freedom Trail generally follows the present day alignment of U.S. 23 from the Ohio River at Portsmouth, north through central Ohio. North of Marion County, the trail follows S.R. 4 to Sandusky on the shore of Lake Erie.

In 2004 and early 2005, brass markers—forged in Marietta, Ohio at the Sewah Foundry—were placed in locations of significant local importance along the trail. Each marker bears text on both sides: one side with a general statement of the UGRR’s history, and the other detailing the significance of the neighboring community and the contributions of local UGRR conductors. Local historians, the

Friends of Freedom Society and the State of Ohio Historic Preservation Office collaborated in the research, writing and authentication of the historic texts.

Using this map as a guide, ODOT and the Friends of Freedom Society encourage Ohioans and tourists alike to visit each historic site and learn more about an important chapter in Ohio—and American—history. The back of the map has an area for notes, stories about the UGRR in each county, and pictures of related sites. The marker descriptions on the map itself have a place to record the date you visited each site.



Friends of Freedom Society, Inc. Ohio Underground Railroad Association

The Friends of Freedom Society, Inc. (FOFS) and the Ohio Underground Railroad Association (the research arm of FOFS) is a grassroots, all volunteer non-profit organization dedicated to the research, identification, documentation, and preservation of Underground Railroad sites in Ohio.

The organization sponsors an annual Underground Railroad Summit every October in a different Ohio location for those interested in Underground Railroad history; maintains a list of Ohio’s endangered Underground Railroad sites, and is an advocate for their preservation; installs Ohio Underground Railroad historic markers at individual sites, community parks, and trails; develops Underground Railroad education programs; and is producing Freedom Seekers—Ohio and the Underground Railroad. The FOFS has distributed red marker flags with its logo to documented Underground Railroad sites in communities around Ohio.

The Ohio Underground Railroad Association coordinates the activities of volunteers throughout the state as it documents Underground Railroad sites. If you are interested in supporting, joining, or becoming a volunteer with the organization, please visit our website at www.ohioundergroundrailroad.org, or call 614-868-1246.

CREDITS:

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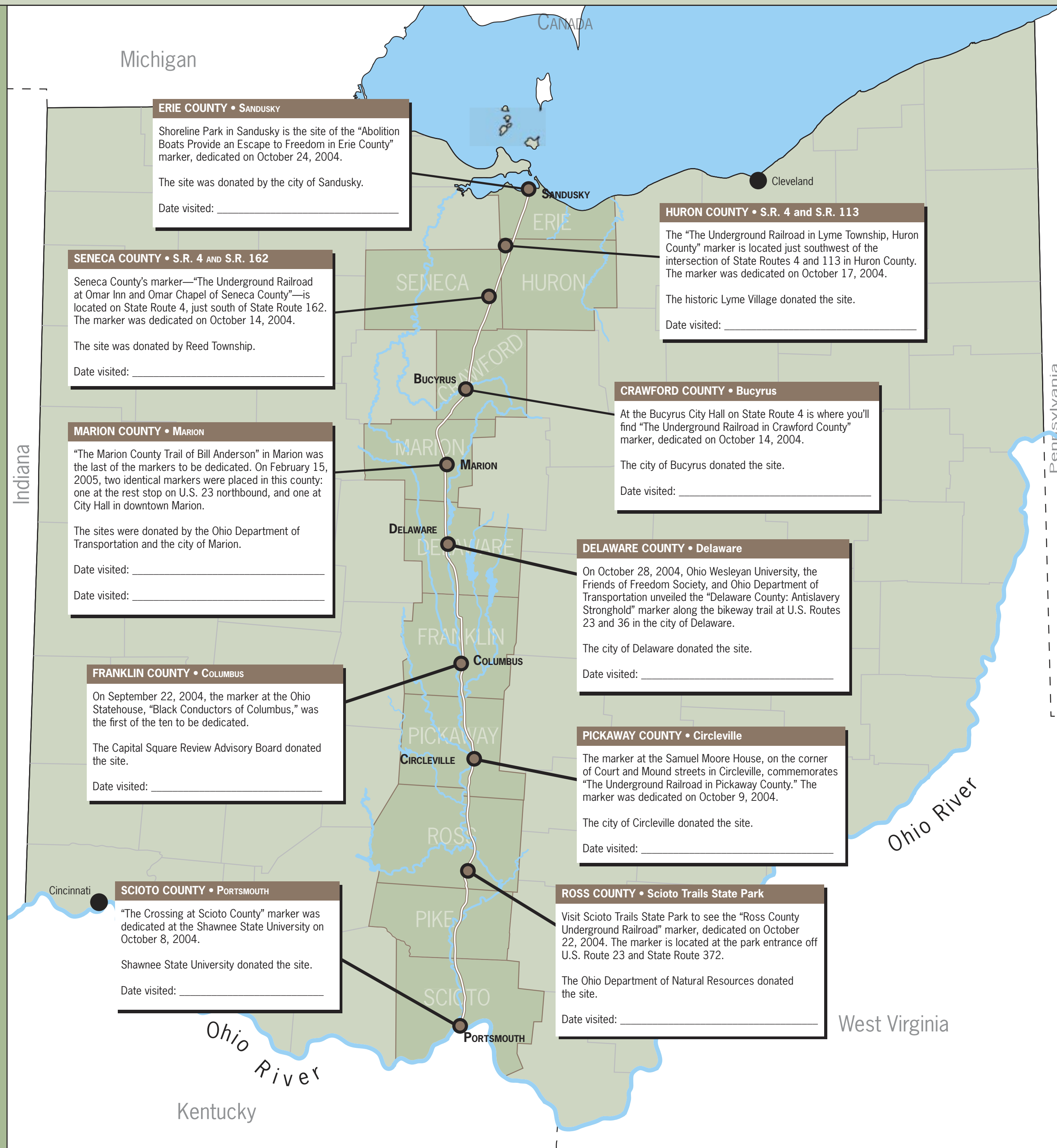
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The Crossing at Scioto County

Scioto County was dangerous for runaway slaves because of its proximity to slave-holding states. Runaways often had to continue their journey northward. Numerous slaves fled from Kentucky across the Ohio River to Wheelersburg or Portsmouth. Oftentimes a riverboat captain, William McClain, delivered his human cargo to J.J. Minor, and abolitionist, who would deliver them to the Lucas



The Kelton House, on East Town Street, was one of many UGRR "stations" in Columbus.

or Love families in Houston Hollow. There, they followed the Scioto River to Waverly and to the free black community called P.P. Settlement in Pebble Township.

The Underground Railroad in Pike County

Pike County also remained a dangerous place for African American families. Free blacks living in the Scioto Valley Corridor were met with resistance, and even violence, from other residents. Many of the thirteen free black families living near the Ross County border in Pike County moved away when their homes, and even their schools, were burned. But one family, the Barnetts, refused to be driven out and became actively involved as Underground Railroad conductors.

Ross County Underground Railroad

Four major Underground Railroad routes ran through Ross County into Chillicothe. Two routes followed the Scioto River, while the other two followed old State Route 23 on the east and State Route 104 on the west. These trails had been made by Native Americans and were well established by the time white settlers reached the Scioto Valley.

Quakers, Presbyterians, and African-Americans were active Underground Railroad conductors along these routes.

The Quaker settlement near Chillicothe offered a safe haven to runaway slaves. In 1836, the Presbytery of Chillicothe issued a letter to its sister church in Mississippi outlining the reasons for the abolition of slavery and the assistance to runaway slaves. The Chancellor, Leach, Langston, and Redman families were all African-Americans who ran Underground Railroad stations in the town of Chillicothe.

The Underground Railroad in Pickaway County

In general, Pickaway County had mixed feelings about the Underground Railroad due to the prevalent southern sentiment at the time. But there were individuals who were active abolitionists and served as conductors on the road to freedom. In Circleville, Phillip B. Doddridge, Reverend William Hanby, Reverend Immanuel Buchwalter, and George Stanhope—a free black man—all lead runaway slaves under the veil of night. On one occasion, George Stanhope transported three runaways who had sought shelter at the Doddridge home. Mr. Doddridge was away on business and his wife sent the children to fetch Stanhope. He took them to another active Underground Railroad agent, Jonathon Dreisbach, whose farm was seven miles outside of Circleville.



Circleville's Moore House, a former hiding place for runaway slaves bound for freedom, now houses Pickaway County's Genealogical Library.

Colonel Samuel Moore, a staunch abolitionist,

kept silent about his clandestine activities until the end of the Civil War. Local lore claims that his house is haunted by a runaway slave who died there en route to Canada.

Black Conductors of Columbus

Franklin County was a very active destination on the Underground Railroad. Communities like Clintonville, Worthington, Westerville, and Reynoldsburg were proud supporters of the anti-slavery cause, and their citizens took great personal risk to attend to the necessities of runaway slaves. In downtown Columbus, a number of African-Americans—who worked as waiters, porters, barbers, and painters—were the leaders of Underground Railroad activity in and out of Columbus. Prominent black men such as the Reverend James Poindexter, John T. Ward, William Washington, Jeremiah Freeland and others were members of the Anti-slavery Baptist Church where Underground Railroad activity was strongly advocated. Many prominent white abolitionists were also incensed by the enslavement of African people and were formidable agents on the Underground Railroad.

In 1812, James Kilbourne—the founder of Worthington—liberated a captured runaway slave, placed him in an army supply wagon, and sent him north to Sandusky. Similarly, prominent shoe-and-leather dealer, Lee Van Slyke, hid a kidnapped slave girl in the attic of his E. Town Street home for three weeks until she could be transported safely to Canada. The black citizens of Columbus presented Van Slyke with an engraved silver pitcher in honor of his bravery and dedication to the freedom cause.



Seven Oaks, Delaware

Delaware County: Antislavery Stronghold

Runaway slaves who had traveled through Worthington on the road to freedom often made Delaware County their next stop.

Delaware served as home to hundreds of Quakers (The Society of Friends). Stations like the Gooding Tavern and Seven Oaks, originally called Oak Grove, served as an active station and still stands on William Street just west of the Ohio Department of Transportation headquarters. The Benjamin Bartholomew House in southern Delaware County, also known as the old "Toll House," gave refuge to runaways in a secret basement room which was closed off from the main house.

"Little Africa" was the home of thirty-five freed slaves who had been sent from North Carolina, and were assisted by conductors in Portsmouth. They had been freed by their former master's widow, who did not believe in slavery. She provided them with manumission papers, and horses and wagons to head north. Their journey led them to the farm of Samuel Patterson, a well known abolitionist and member of the area's anti-slavery Wesleyan Methodist congregation. Once they made it safely to the hamlet of Africa, they were able to live in empty log cabins that had been abandoned by residents who were building permanent homes.

These freed slaves were in constant danger as they traveled. It was common for slave catchers to abduct free blacks as well as runaway slaves for a reward.

The Underground Railroad in Marion County

Marion County saw its share of Underground Railroad activity. On the east side of the Flat Run River sat the Clyde Settlement, whose inhabitants were Scotch-Irish. They ran grist and linseed oil mills and stone quarries along the middle fork of the river. The Clyde settlers were not willing to tolerate bondage imposed on another race of people, having themselves endured serfdom and oppression in Europe before coming to America to seek a better life. Their settlement was used as a safe haven for runaways for

forty years.

Two of the most noted anti-slavery leaders and conductors on the Underground Railroad in Marion County were Joseph Morris of Richland Township, and Allen McNeal of Tully Township. Morris used the basement and attic of his two-story frame home to shelter escaped slaves making their way to Canada. McNeal's home sat far from the road and was nestled in a secluded area, so runaways were easily housed without being detected. A well-known abolitionist throughout the area, McNeal was a member of the Whig Party. He later joined the Free Soil Party, and ultimately joined in the newly organized Republican Party. As an Abolitionist candidate for Congress, McNeal spoke out publicly against the evils of slavery during a time when it was still quite dangerous to do so.

The Underground Railroad in Crawford County

According to Crawford County historians, nearly a third of the runaway slaves escaping into Ohio either came unassisted or were "conducted" through the county on their way to freedom in Canada. The county had numerous routes and conductors. Slaves could walk the "Kilbourne Road," (State Route 23), to State Route 98 and then on to State Route 4.



Omar Chapel, Seneca County

Crawford County was home to about thirty residents willing to aid runaways. Presbyterians John Moderswell and his daughter, in Bucyrus; Peter Wert in Leesville; Benjamin Warner on S.R. 4; Fisher Quaintance and the Quakers on North and Tiffin Roads; and the O'Dells, Parchers, Campbells, and Trimbles from New Winchester all gave shelter to tired, shivering, fearful sojourners.

After the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, operations became more dangerous and secretive. The Portland Road route through Galion shifted to "Black Pete's" north of New Winchester that ran to Stetzer Road. Women and children could hide in Robinson's Mill or the old Luke Iron Horse Tavern, and then move through Sandusky Township to McIntyre's, or Henry Kaler's along the Sandusky River. A tree planted in honor of President Abraham Lincoln's Inauguration stands at State Routes 598 and 39, southeast of Trio, where runaways passed through to Oberlin. A route also lead to Sulphur Springs through New Washington, ending at Caroline.

The Underground Railroad at Omar Inn & Omar Chapel of Seneca County

The Columbus-Sandusky Turnpike, now State Route 4, was a principal route on the Underground Railroad through Seneca County. In the county, runaways were hidden in the cellar of the Omar Tavern—also known as Reed's Tavern—which was a brick, two-story stagecoach inn on a knoll south of Omar Chapel on the east side of the road. Runaways also hid in the livery stable across the road during the day, and at nightfall were transported to the Seven Mile House, south of Sandusky, at the corner of S.R. 4 and Mason Road.

In addition to sheltering escaping slaves, the inn also housed captured Confederate officers being transported to the prison camp at Johnson's Island off Marblehead Peninsula.



Friends of Freedom Society's Cathy Nelson addresses attendees at the Lyme Township marker dedication.

The Underground Railroad in Lyme Township, Huron County

Huron County was very active on the Underground Railroad. There were many stops and conductors—probably more that are unknown than are documented.

The Seymour, Strong, Barnard, Nims, and Smith families are all recognized on Lyme Township's Historic Marker, located in Historic Lyme Village.

The minister of Lyme Church—Reverend Hart—listed in the genealogy section of his family Bible a runaway slave he took in as a family member. The Russell Tavern in Lyme was also an active UGRR stop. Many of those seeking refuge there were on their way to Sandusky or Huron where they could cross Lake Erie and be free in Canada.



Rush R. Sloane was a lawyer, abolitionist, and UGRR "conductor." His home in Sandusky, pictured here, was a known UGRR station.

In nearby Bellevue, the Miller family sheltered fleeing slaves and ushered them west on the Maumee Western Reserve Turnpike (U.S. Route 20) to Fremont and Toledo. From there, they could travel to Detroit and cross the river to Canada.

Other documented Huron County trails connected Greenwich (which had a large Quaker settlement), Fitchville—with its well-documented Seelye Palmer House—and Peru, where the Parker and Wilson families were active conductors.

Norwalk had a black settlement known as "Africa." By 1843 it had over 100 residents and a log school. Samuel Carr and Frederick Spears were the first blacks to settle in "Africa." They were soon joined by others, who cleared the land for farming and planted orchards.

George and Henry Lockwood and Hiram Stewart in Milan provided cover for slaves before helping them on to Sandusky, and Lyman Scott maintained a station for some thirty years prior to 1860.

The east side of the county was well represented in the famous Wellington Rescue in Lorain County, in which John Price—a runaway abducted by slave catchers to be returned to slavery—was rescued by a large crowd of

citizens opposed to the Fugitive Slave Act.

Abolition Boats Provide an Escape to Freedom in Erie County

Erie County, situated on the south shore of Lake Erie, was an area of great activity along the routes of the Underground Railroad. Due to its location on Lake Erie, Sandusky was a major terminus on the Underground Railroad. Runaways were told that Sandusky was their "hope" for freedom. The Sandusky docks, particularly those on Water Street, were well known departure points for runaways fleeing by boat to Canada.

Over 50 known Underground Railroad agents operated in Sandusky with the first documented escape being in 1820. A runaway slave belonging to a Mr. John Riley arrived on foot at the home of Abner Strong on Strong's Ridge in Huron County. Under the veil of darkness, this runaway was transported to Marsh's Tavern where a black stableman sheltered him in the back of the tavern. When the runaway's master, James Riley, arrived at Marsh's Tavern to retrieve his human property and offering a \$300 reward, the hidden slave was placed on a sailboat headed for Malden, Canada. Captain P. Shepard, owner of the sailboat, was a resident of Marsh's Tavern.

The towns of Venice, Mills Creek, Huron, Milan, and Vermillion were equally active on the Underground Railroad.



Sandusky's marker on Lake Erie's shore.

Suggested Reading for Children & Adults

The following list is just a small sampling of titles available about the Underground Railroad, its history, and the history of slavery in America. For a more extensive listing, please consult the Friends of Freedom Society Ohio Underground Railroad Association compiled bibliography at www.ohioundergroundrailroad.org/Booklist.htm.

Nat Turner and the Slave Revolt

Tracy Barrett
Millbrook Press, 1993

Freedom's Fruit

William H. Hooks
Knopf, 1996

I Was a Slave: True Life Stories Told by Former American Slaves in the 1930's

Donna Wyant Howell, Editor
American Legacy Books, 1995

True North: A Novel of the UGRR

Kathryn Lasky
Scholastic, 1996

From Slave Ship to Freedom Road

Julius Lester
Dial Books, 1998

If You Traveled on the UGRR

Ellen Levine
Scholastic, 1988

Steal Away Home

Lois Ruby
Macmillan, 1994

Ebony Sea

Irene Smalls
Longmeadow Press, 1995

Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman

Dorothy Sterling
Scholastic, 1987

Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the UGRR

Jacqueline Tobin & Raymond G. Dobard
Doubleday, 1999

Up From Slavery: An Autobiography

Booker T. Washington
Signet Classics, 2000

Silver Highway

Marian Wells
Bethany House, 1989

Journey to Freedom: A Story of the UGRR

Courtnei C. Wright
Holiday House, 1994

Websites of Interest

City of Columbus - Ohio's History
http://www.columbus.gov/kids/Black_History/Underground_RR.htm

Kelton House Museum & Gardens
<http://www.keltonhouse.com>

The Underground Railroad Foundation
<http://www.ugrrf.org/>

The River-to-Lake Freedom Trail

Ohio's Underground Railroad Commemorative Highway



Notes