



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

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Old Delaware State Capitol Mounts Underground Railroad Exhibit

On February 23, the Delaware Department of Historical and Cultural Affairs inaugurated the exhibit, "The Path to Freedom: A History of the Underground Railroad in Delaware," at the New Castle Court House Museum. The exhibit, on display indefinitely, was created by museum staff working with the Collections, Affiliates, Research and Exhibits (CARE) team of the state Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs.

The exhibit explores Delaware's role in the clandestine network that transported American slaves to freedom, including the journey of the Hawkins family from bondage in Maryland through Delaware to freedom in Pennsylvania. Part of the exhibit explores some of the challenges faced by Black Delawareans after the Civil War and showcases Delaware trailblazers Jane Mitchell, "Judy" Johnson, Louis Redding, and Lisa Rochester, among many others, who helped break racial and gender barriers in Delaware.

The exhibit's opening featured a screening of "Whispers of Angels: A Story of the Underground Railroad," the 2002 award-winning film that ex-

amines the firsthand efforts of Thomas Garrett, William Still, and Harriet Tubman in helping to free American slaves. Delawarean Garrett worked as an Underground Railroad safe-house operator for more than thirty years, shuttling Tubman and her charges to the safety of Still's safe-house in nearby Pennsylvania. The film was shot in New Castle and other Delaware sites and stars Blair Underwood and Ed Asner.

Constructed in 1732, the New Castle Court House originally served as Delaware's first state capitol. Today it operates as one of the oldest active court buildings in the United States. Here, the Colonial Assembly passed the 1776 Separation Resolution creating the State of Delaware. During its nearly 300 years, this landmark has played many pivotal roles in the political, social, and commercial life of both New Castle and Delaware. The museum is a partner site of the First State National Historical Park.

The museum is located at 211 Delaware Street in New Castle and is open every day but Monday. Admission is free. For more, visit history.delaware.gov or call 302.323.4453.

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A Three-State Underground Railroad Mountain Route

One of an occasional series on Underground Railroad sites and people

Together, a shallow river crossing, a hidden maroon community of escapees, a chain of safe-houses strung along a mountaintop trail, and a secure destination made for a safer than usual escape route for freedom seekers crossing the Potomac River into Frederick County, Maryland. This documented route runs along the crest of Catoctin Mountain, a long Appalachian ridge that spans the 45-mile neck of western Maryland and extends into Virginia to the south and Pennsylvania to the north. Heading west, Catoctin Mountain is the first mountain encountered in the Appalachian range. The mountain summits at 1,903 feet near Camp David, the presidential retreat.

As he later stated in his autobiography, in 1841 freedom seeker Charles Bentley crossed the Potomac River at Point of Rocks in Frederick County and "went up alongside Catoctin Mountain."

John Thompson, a freedom seeker who later recounted his escape in his autobiography, said of his 1856 passage across the Potomac and through Frederick County, "At night a free colored man took us through unfrequented paths, to escape the vigilance of the overseer, until he said he could go no further, as, if we were taken and he found in our company, it would ruin him." Thompson, too, crossed the Potomac at Point of Rocks at the foot

of Catoctin Mountain.

Crossing at Point of Rocks where the river runs wide and shallow led Bentley, Thompson, and others, or they could have been guided, to Hall Town, an African-American maroon community hidden in deep woods on the eastern slope of Catoctin Mountain two miles above the river. Hall Town hung on until 1912 when the last of its people came down from its deep backwoods perch to the verdant Monocacy Valley below. A few old stone foundations and a chimney remain if you know where to find them. Local resident Charles Crum, Sr., who has

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Migrating Quakers Brought the Underground Railroad to Iowa

Free Press thanks subscriber Steve Hankin for informing us of the Quaker migration to Iowa.

While most religions chose their church names without much consideration of geography as American pioneers moved west, with plenty of resulting St. Marks, St. Johns, etc., Quakers tended to mark their new meeting houses with place names of where their congregations had originated. Newly created Quaker congregations founded this way quite often remained connected with congregations where they had previously worshiped. Sometimes the name of the newly settled community became the same as that of the one left. So if in fact Salem, Massachusetts, had a connection to Salem, Iowa, that settlement may have had a later connection with Salem, Oregon.

Over time some of these locations vanished. In Iowa, there was a "New Garden" Quaker settlement that probably had a connection with the "New Garden" Quaker group in North Carolina. Not only did place names move west in this way, so did Quaker abolitionist beliefs, as a number of Iowa Quak-

Trail

lived his entire life between Hall Town and Mountville, says that the trail between the two still existed, though faintly, when he hiked it as a teen in the 1960s.

Three miles further along the mountain, trail users would have come to Mountville, a long-established African American hamlet, still thriving. Continuing north along the rising crest, freedom seekers encountered a string of locations identified as having been active in aiding freedom seekers. Hayes Spring, Bussard Flat, Markley Fields, and perhaps the Coates Cabin, are all located near Garfield and Wolfsville, Maryland.

In 2001, Mark Lewis of Garfield, Frederick County, wrote of the account told to him by Charles E. Misner, an African-American who lived all his life near Garfield, and who was born in 1862 and died in 1948 at age 86. Mr. Misner told Mr. Lewis that Mr. Misner's family aided freedom seekers from the early 1800s until the end of the Civil War, and that "the slaves would gather in Markley Fields in the Catoctin Mountains at a place known as Bussard Flat . . . before making their last dash to freedom over the Mason-Dixon Line. This place was called 'the fountain' or Hays Spring." This location is about eight miles south of the Mason-Dixon Line and Pennsylvania.

The approximately 45-mile trek from the

er communities are believed to be places that took in freedom seekers. Salem, Iowa, Quakers hijacked an enslaved person from Rule Daggs, a slave owner from Missouri, who recaptured his property and was forced to go to court to prove his "ownership." While the hearing was taking place, over half of his "property" disappeared.

A vanished meeting house along the Jones County border in Linn County, Iowa, is the Hopewell Meeting, originally founded by anti-slavery Quakers who had been booted out of the faith in Ohio for creating disunion with anti-abolitionist Quakers. Moving west, they were accepted into the Red Cedar Monthly Meeting in the Quaker Community of West Branch, in Cedar County, Iowa. Settling north of West Branch, the newcomers established their meeting house near the extant village of Viola, naming it Hopewell. Its origins reach back to the meeting house of Hopewell, Virginia, at the mouth of the Shenandoah Valley. Again, these Ohio Quaker abolitionists were looking back to the roots of some of the families

Potomac River to Pennsylvania along the Catoctin Trail route would have taken a fast walker two days, a moderate walker four. The reward was the freedom seeker's entering a free state and relatively more safety for the first time.

Once in Pennsylvania and leaving the Catoctin trail, another 20 miles along Pennsylvania's southeast corridor Underground Railroad route took some freedom seekers to the home near Littlestown of prominent Quaker Underground Railroad safe-house operators William (1788-1865) and Phebe (1890-1873) Wright. The Wrights assisted approximately 1,000 freedom seekers from 1819 through the end of the Civil War. These included Dr. J.W.C. Pennington, who credits the Wrights with teaching him to read and write during his six-month refuge with them, assistance that enabled him to become a Presbyterian pastor and author of several books, most notably *The Fugitive Blacksmith* (1849), his narrative of escape from slavery in Maryland.

One can get a close idea of the ruggedness and beauty that freedom seekers would have experienced walking the Catoctin Trail, which is no longer continuous, by hiking the Maryland section of the Appalachian Trail along the ridgeline of South Mountain five miles to the west. In fact, the two trails merge and become one just south of the Mason-Dixon Line.

that had moved away from Virginia to Ohio to Iowa over slavery.

Not actively aiding movement of enslaved people from the South to Canada was a faith issue for the transplanted Iowa Quakers, and they would not stop with their Underground Railroad activities even after they had been removed from their religious organization in Ohio. Re-establishing themselves in Iowa re-connected them to their faith and with people who thought like they did. They continued aiding and assisting slaves fleeing north to Canada.

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