



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

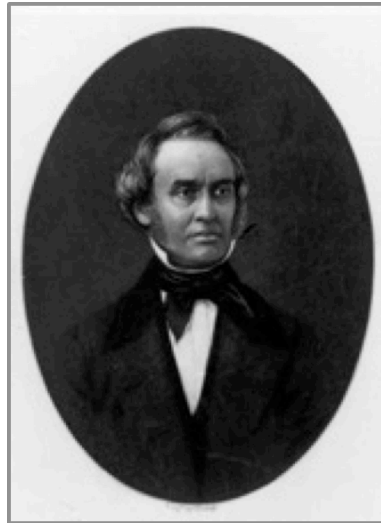
Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

urrFreePress.com

Robert Rantoul, Forgotten Champion of Abolition and Social Justice

During a brilliant legal career, Boston's Robert Rantoul, Jr. gained a reputation among allies and opponents alike as one of his generation's best legal minds, and as an unflinching champion of human rights and of equality under the law for the ordinary person. When he died in 1852 at 47, his career trajectory was straight toward the United States Supreme Court where he might well have made the difference in 1857 in the infamous Dred Scott case which outraged northern states and went far in precipitating the Civil War.

On April 4, 1852, four months before his early death and as a sitting member of Congress, Rantoul injected himself into one of the most notorious cases in Massachusetts legal history. On the way to his office that day, Rantoul came upon a crowd outside Boston's state courthouse where Thomas Sims, an escaped slave who had just been arrested under the Fugitive Slave Act, was being held for trial. On request of attorney C. G. Loring, Rantoul on the spot began assisting Sims' defense without compensation or opportunity for preparation. But with the Fugitive Slave Act being law such as it was, the case was doomed from the outset and Sims was re-enslaved. Rantoul's on-the-spot defense of Thomas Sims, brilliance during trial, and demolishing argument on the unconstitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act cemented a first-rate moral and legal reputation for decades to come in and well beyond Massachusetts.



In 1850, Rantoul's Boston Congressional district had elected him to the United States House of Representatives. However, before his term began he was appointed by the Massachusetts legislature to the United States Senate to serve the remainder of the term of Robert Winthrop who had been appointed after the resignation of Daniel Webster and resigned when he lost election to a full term. After serving out Winthrop's term, Rantoul then took his seat in the House where he served until his death in 1852. Prior to his Congressional service, Rantoul had served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives (1835-1839), on the Massachusetts Board of Education (1837-1842), as United States Attorney for the District of Massachusetts (1846-1849), on the

Please see Rantoul, page 2, column 1

IN THIS ISSUE



It is too easy to forget Underground Railroad heroes from the past. Let's recall this one.

1



Be sure to make this update in your email address book.

1



A fine book on an unrelated topic reveals several Underground Railroad figures, sites and stories.

2



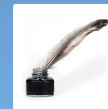
Get listed. Let the world know about your Underground Railroad site or program through *Free Press's* Lynx.

Lynx at our website



Publicize your event for free at the *Free Press* Datebook.

Datebook at our website



Submit a *Free Press* article or letter to the editor.

Email us at info@urrfreepress.com.

Please Note: *Free Press* Has a New Email Address

Maybe it has happened to you, too. Two of our email addresses were hacked and ended up being used by spammers sending out high volumes of unwanted emails. We hope you were not the recipient of any. As a result, we have eradicated the two abused email addresses which were publisher@urrfreepress.com and editor@urrfreepress.com.

To now reach publisher Peter H. Michael, email him directly at pjm@peterhsmichael.com. Please update your address book.

For general information, continue to use info@urrfreepress.com.

To place an advertisement or inquire about ads, continue to use ads@urrfreepress.com or visit urrfreepress.com/#Advertising.

To report what appears to be abuse of a *Free Press* email account, please contact us right away at abuse@urrfreepress.com.

Thank you, and happy holidays to you and yours.

A Very Rural Kansas County Played Its Part in the Underground Railroad

One of an Occasional Series on Underground Railroad Safehouses and Routes

Author Bill McKibben called William Least-Heat Moon's *PrairyErth* "the deepest map anyone ever made of an American place, a majestic survey of land, time and people in a single county of the Kansas plains. It takes the author - by car, on foot, and in mind - into the core of our continent backward and forward through a brilliant spectrum of time and place."

Heat-Moon, author of the highly acclaimed *Blue Highways*, recounts in *PrairyErth* five Underground Railroad stories or sites he came upon as he criss-crossed Chase County, Kansas, population 2,800.

Heat-Moon uncovers that the nearly deserted hamlet of Gladstone was "a stop on the Underground Railroad" where freedom seeker Charlie, last name unknown, "wizard of the fiddle," was hidden in the Haworth home, then moved on north by Moses Jacobs.

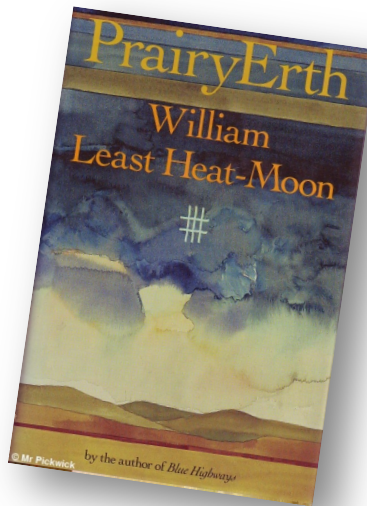
Salmon P. Chase (after whom the county was named), Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury and later Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, gets a mention as attorney for a safe-house operator.

Rantoul

commission to revise the laws of Massachusetts, and on the board of directors of the Illinois Central Railroad.

In his early legal practice, Rantoul made his mark in skilled argumentation, particularly in two cases.

In 1842 Rantoul defended several Rhode Islanders who had been arrested, imprisoned and charged with attempting to extend the right to vote to African Americans in Massachusetts. Rantoul successfully challenged that the trial had been moved deliberately from the county in which charges had been brought to another in which the defendants were being judged by an obviously stacked jury. As lead counsel, Rantoul's winning argument involved a learned tracing of the principle of trial by one's peers from the Magna Carta, through English Common Law, to the Declaration of Independence. Even Daniel Webster, the opposing counsel, clapped in appreciation as Rantoul concluded his argument. Wrote Rhode Island's leading newspaper the following day, "Mr. Rantoul brought to bear, on the merits of the question, a force of reason, and an extent of learning, which startled



Heat-Moon tells of safe-house owner William Lyon, and at length of Quaker conductor Samuel Wood who would go on to become Speaker of the Kansas Legislature. Heat-Moon also disproves an Underground Railroad claim of a home not built until 1881.

Though *PrairyErth* is not an Underground Railroad book *per se*, what is there is very well researched and stated. This book is also a terrific read.

and electrified the court, and a convincing eloquence, which drew involuntary outbursts of applause from a numerous and enlightened assembly."

In the Journeymen Boot-Makers' Case, Rantoul argued that labor unions should be recognized as legal in the United States. Losing in lower court, Rantoul appealed and succeeded with the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts which decided that labor organizations were lawful if organized for legal purposes if and they legally achieved their goals. As his biographer Luther Hamilton put it, Rantoul "succeeded in obtaining one of the completest triumphs that it ever fell to the lot of an American lawyer to achieve."

On August 7, 1852, two days after his 47th birthday, Robert Rantoul died of strep throat. Two years later, the village of Rantoul, Illinois, was named for him as was Rantoul, Kansas, in 1862, in both cases in recognition of his lifelong defense of human rights. Rantoul is a good example of the kind of selfless American who worked diligently to better his nation but whose fine example has faded into near anonymity today.

Need to Promote?

Would your site, program, event, conference or book benefit from being promoted to tens of thousands of Underground Railroad enthusiasts? *Free Press* is read by more people in the Underground Railroad community than any other publication.

Ads are easy and affordable. For display or line ad rates, visit urrfreepress.com/#Advertising.

THINGS YOU CAN DO AT FREE PRESS

Click on links at urrfreepress.com to do any of the following.

Subscribe

View or Add to Datebook

Send News, Letters, Articles or Ads

Join the Community or View Lynx

Make a Free Press Prize Nomination

Rate an Underground Railroad Site

List an Underground Railroad Site

Read Underground Railroad Surveys

Underground Railroad Free Press® Independent Reporting on Today's Underground Railroad

Peter H. Michael, Publisher
publisher@urrfreepress.com
301 | 874 | 0235

Underground Railroad Free Press is a free newsletter published by Underground Railroad Free Press, 2455 Ballenger Creek Pike, Adamstown, Maryland, 21710. Back issues are available free at our website. *Free Press* is distributed by email. Send email address changes and new subscriber email addresses to publisher@urrfreepress.com.

We welcome news articles and letters to the editor. All rights to submissions including emails and letters will be treated as unconditionally assigned to *Free Press* for publication and copyright purposes, and subject to our unrestricted right to edit and comment editorially unless otherwise agreed with authors.

Free Press accepts tasteful nonpolitical advertising which we reserve the right to reject for any reason which in our sole judgment is not acceptable. Submit advertising in pdf, jpg or text formats. Visit our website for rates and layout specifications.

Contents of any *Free Press* issue are protected by copyright and may not be reproduced in whole or in part for any reason without prior approval of the publisher. *Underground Railroad Free Press* is a registered trademark.