



Leaders of the Underground Railroad

Harriet Tubman

The greatest conductor of the Underground Railroad was a runaway slave named Harriet Tubman, known to those she helped escape as “Moses.” Born as one of 11 children in a slave family, she was mistreated and beaten by her master, who often rented her out to other people. She was once hit on the head so hard by an overseer that she suffered a kind of drowsiness the rest of her life if she was not active. Finding that two of her brothers and she were going to be sold to another owner, Harriet decided to escape even though her husband and brothers were reluctant to join her.

Harriet escaped from her owner in Maryland and got to Pennsylvania, a free state. She tried to return and rescue her husband, but he had already remarried and refused to flee. Gradually, Harriet established a route of Underground Railroad stations and made more than 20 trips into Southern states, rescuing her two brothers, many other members of her family, and over 300 other slaves. Slave owners posted rewards for her capture totaling over \$40,000. Harriet carried a pistol on her rescue missions and threatened to shoot anyone who refused to cooperate once they were on the run.

Harriet became a famous antislavery speaker and activist and helped John Brown recruit some of his followers. During the Civil War, Harriet served as a

spy, scout, and nurse for the Union army. After the war she set up her own home as a refuge for needy freed slaves.

Thomas Garrett

One of the greatest stationmasters of the Underground Railroad was Thomas Garrett, a Quaker from Delaware who helped shelter and transport more than 2,700 escaped slaves along secret escape routes. The state of Maryland once offered a reward of \$10,000 (an immense sum of money at the time) for his capture. He joked that if they doubled the reward, he would capture himself.

In 1848 Garrett was arrested and fined \$5,400 for helping fugitive slaves. He had to auction off all his possessions to pay the fine but refused to quit. Despite the severe punishments, Garrett declared that if anyone knew of a fugitive who needed help, he would be happy to provide a meal and a place to hide.

William Wells Brown

William Wells Brown was born a slave. He tried to escape with his mother, but they were caught. His mother was sold away to the deep South in New Orleans, and he never saw her again. Later, Brown escaped from his owner and reached the free state of Illinois, where he set up a ship business. He allowed slaves to escape on his ships, which carried many fugitives to free soil. Later in life, he became a writer and a self-taught doctor.



Leaders of the Underground Railroad *(cont.)*

John Fairfield

John Fairfield was born into a white, slaveholding Virginia family. For many years, Fairfield traveled through the Southern states posing as a slave trader but carefully seeking slaves who wanted to escape. Using his perfect cover as a slaver, he managed to bring hundreds of slaves to freedom in the North. He was especially adept at locating and rescuing the wives and children of men who had escaped to freedom. Fairfield was still trying to bring out fugitives when he was killed during a slave revolt in Tennessee in 1860.

Josiah Henson

Josiah Henson, a Maryland slave, was whipped with more than 100 lashes for trying to protect his mother from a vicious overseer. His ear was nailed to the whipping post and then cut off. Josiah's father was sold and never seen again. Josiah was beaten so badly by another overseer that he could never lift his arms above his head again. He finally ran away through the wilderness of Indiana and Ohio with his sick wife and his children. Facing starvation and threatened by hungry wolves, Henson and his family eventually made it to Canadian soil. He learned how to work and survive in Canada and taught other fugitives the lessons he had learned about growing crops and living as a free person.

Henson later walked more than 400 miles back to Kentucky to rescue the family of his friend, James Lightfoot. They were too fearful to flee so he ended up helping another group of 30 slaves who lived more than 50 miles away. These fugitives from several states banded together to escape, and he led them across the Ohio River through Indiana and on to Canada.

A year later, Henson returned to Kentucky for the Lightfoot family, who had finally decided they wished to escape. With slave catchers hot on their trail, Henson helped them organize their escape and led them to Canada. Later in life he became a minister. Henson was also the first fugitive slave to have an audience with Queen Victoria in England.

Richard Daly

Richard Daly was a trusted slave who lived in Kentucky near the Ohio River. He was married to a slave and had four children but chose not to escape and leave them. However, he helped more than 30 slaves escape by ferrying them across the Ohio River at night and then passing the runaways on to an agent of the Underground Railroad. When his wife died at the age of 20, Daly escaped with his children before they could be separated and sold away.



Leaders of the Underground Railroad *(cont.)*

John Parker

By all standards, John Parker was an exceptional man. He was a freed black who lived and owned a foundry in the antislavery community of Ripley, Ohio. One of 500 black conductors of the Underground Railroad, Parker spent many nights secretly rowing a boat across the wide expanse of the Ohio River looking for fugitives.

Many nights he ventured through the plantations of northern Kentucky looking for runaways to help. Once he went to rescue a couple, but they would not leave without their baby who was forced to sleep at the foot of their owner's bed as insurance against their escape. Parker slipped into the house, grabbed the baby, knocked a candle and a loaded pistol off a stand, and raced away with the baby and couple. He got them across the river and hidden before the owner could find them. Parker became a legend among fugitive slaves and an enemy to slave catchers.

William Still

William Still was the son of an escaped slave named Charity, who on her second attempt managed to run away from her Maryland owners with her two daughters. She joined her free husband in a backcountry area of New Jersey. As a young man, William went to work for the Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia and was soon involved in all of the efforts to help fugitives escape. He began to keep detailed accounts of the adventures and

escapes of the people he helped, which were published after slavery ended.

Still helped move escapees along the network through Philadelphia to Boston, New York, and Canada. One of his "passengers" was his long-lost brother Peter, who his mother had been forced to leave when she escaped decades before. Still used a quirk in the law to free the slaves of a U.S. ambassador who had been brought to Philadelphia and desired freedom. In his later years, Still became a successful businessman who supported blacks in their struggle for equality.

Reverend John Rankin

The Reverend John Rankin was a true believer in the abolitionist cause. A determined and fiery Presbyterian minister, he tried to convince his Kentucky neighbors of the evils of slavery. When he moved to Ripley, Ohio, Rankin became a leader in the Underground Railroad. He and his wife helped move untold numbers of escaping slaves along the route to freedom. Working with many black and white supporters, they secretly moved runaways into safe locations.

Eliza Harris, who crossed the Ohio River with her child in her arms, was hidden by Rankin in his own home. In the year after her escape, Eliza returned hoping to find her remaining slave children. John Rankin helped her return to Kentucky and escape again, this time with her other five children.

Reading
Passages

Leaders of the Underground Railroad *(cont.)*

Jonathan Walker

In 1844 Jonathan Walker was a white shipbuilder who tried to help seven slaves escape to the Bahamas. They were caught, and the slaves were returned to their owners. Walker was taken to Florida, made to pay a heavy fine, put on public display so that people could throw rotten eggs at him, and branded on the hand with “SS” indicating a slave stealer. Walker went North where he was a popular speaker at abolitionist meetings and helped other slaves escape.

Levi and Catherine Coffin

Levi and Catherine Coffin, members of the Quaker faith which opposed slavery, ran the Underground Railroad’s “Grand Central Station.” As a young man, Levi began helping slaves escape in his community of New Garden, North Carolina. He made it a point to give food and clothing to runaways and help them find a place to hide and a route North. When he moved to Newport, Indiana, in 1826, his red brick home became a stopping place for over 100 runaways a year as they passed through on their way to Canada. He often hid fugitives in a space under the eaves of his house in an attic with a bed that covered their hiding place.

Levi and his wife Catherine often helped slaves travel through areas patrolled by slave catchers by disguising them. Males

were often disguised as females, and many females were dressed as workingmen or clothed in simple Quaker garb. This clothing covered even the faces and hands of the escapees. Runaways were often hidden in the false bottoms of wagons and moved to other stations along the route to freedom.

Levi visited freed slaves in Canada and came back more determined than ever to raise money for freed blacks and assist those on the run. For more than 25 years, the Coffin home was a way station, hiding place, and refuge for more than 2,500 slaves on the run. Their organization of freed blacks, dedicated fellow Quakers, and determined antislavery advocates was a constant source of help to fugitive slaves. Coffin, his family, and his associates were often threatened by angry slave owners and gangs of slave catchers, but they stayed at their posts until the Civil War ended slavery.

Other Heroes

No one knows the names of all of the people who helped slaves escape along the Underground Railroad, and the stories of many of them are lost forever. One group of five families in southern Ohio helped hide more than 1,000 runaways. Dr. Nathan Thomas of Michigan helped as many as 1,500 slaves reach freedom, and a Maryland preacher named Charles Torrey helped some 400 slaves escape.

Leaders of the Underground Railroad Quiz

Directions: Read pages 11–14 about the leaders of the Underground Railroad. Answer each question below by circling the correct answer.

1. Which conductor of the Underground Railroad later served with the Union army as spy, scout, and nurse?
 - a. William Wells Brown
 - b. Harriet Tubman
 - c. Levi Coffin
 - d. Josiah Henson
2. Who walked more than 400 miles back to Kentucky to rescue the family of his friend, James Lightfoot?
 - a. Richard Daly
 - b. John Rankin
 - c. Levi Coffin
 - d. Josiah Henson
3. Who rescued most of her family and over 300 other slaves on 20 trips into the South?
 - a. Charity Still
 - b. Eliza Harris
 - c. Harriet Tubman
 - d. John Fairfield
4. Which state offered a \$10,000 reward for the capture of Thomas Garret?
 - a. Virginia
 - b. Delaware
 - c. Kentucky
 - d. Maryland
5. Which Michigan doctor helped more than 1,500 fugitive slaves?
 - a. Charles Torrey
 - b. Nathan Thomas
 - c. Jonathan Walker
 - d. Richard Daly
6. Which Philadelphia leader discovered that one of his “passengers” was his own long-lost brother, Peter?
 - a. William Still
 - b. Jonathan Parker
 - c. Richard Daly
 - d. John Fairfield
7. Who hid Eliza Harris in his home, helped her escape, and then helped her return to Kentucky to find her other children?
 - a. Levi Coffin
 - b. Harriet Tubman
 - c. John Rankin
 - d. Jonathan Walker
8. Who helped disguise slaves when they stopped at her home?
 - a. Catherine Coffin
 - b. Harriet Tubman
 - c. Eliza Harris
 - d. John Parker
9. Who rowed many fugitive slaves across the Ohio River?
 - a. John Rankin
 - b. John Parker
 - c. William Still
 - d. Thomas Garrett
10. Which Delaware Quaker lost all of his possessions to pay fines for helping fugitive slaves escape?
 - a. Thomas Garrett
 - b. Levi Coffin
 - c. John Rankin
 - d. John Fairfield

Answer Key

Page 21

1. b
2. c
3. a
4. d
5. c
6. d
7. b
8. b
9. a
10. d

Page 22

1. conductors
2. terminals
3. ticket agents
4. train ran off the track
5. smooth trip
6. pilots
7. brakemen
8. stationmasters
9. stations
10. passengers

Page 23

1. b
2. d
3. c
4. d
5. b
6. a
7. c
8. a
9. b
10. a

Page 24

1. a
2. b
3. b
4. d
5. a

6. c
7. c
8. d
9. a
10. b

Page 25

1. b
2. d
3. c
4. b
5. a
6. b
7. c
8. c
9. a
10. d

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Slave States

1. Alabama
2. Arkansas
3. Delaware
4. Florida
5. Georgia
6. Kentucky
7. Louisiana
8. Maryland
9. Mississippi
10. Missouri
11. North Carolina
12. South Carolina
13. Tennessee
14. Texas
15. Virginia

Free States

1. California
2. Connecticut
3. Illinois
4. Indiana
5. Iowa

6. Kansas
7. Maine
8. Massachusetts
9. Michigan
10. Minnesota
11. New Hampshire
12. New Jersey
13. New York
14. Ohio
15. Oregon
16. Pennsylvania
17. Rhode Island
18. Vermont
19. West Virginia
20. Wisconsin

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1. Indiana, Ohio, Illinois
2. Pennsylvania
3. New Jersey, Rhode Island
4. Ohio, New York, Maine, Michigan, Vermont, New Hampshire, Minnesota
5. Cuba and the Bahamas