

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD  
IN MASSACHUSETTS

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I

UNDERGROUND ROUTES FROM NEW BEDFORD,  
FALL RIVER, AND EASTERN CONNECTICUT

HOW FUGITIVE SLAVES REACHED THE  
NEW ENGLAND STATES

**M**OST of the fugitive slaves who passed through the New England States on the way to Canada and secure freedom, crossed some section of Massachusetts by means of what has long been known in the histories, general and local, as the Underground Railroad. Indeed, this curious combination of anti-slavery routes, which were operated secretly and almost always at night, long antedated the steam railroads from which the system later derived its mystifying name and terminology.

This secret system extended through all the Northern states as far west as Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, and everywhere its methods were substantially the same; but the supply of fugitives who came to New England was brought by the sailing vessels engaged in trade with the West Indies and especially with our South Atlantic seaboard. Generally the fugitives came as stowaways, though occasionally as paid passengers, under the watchful eye of some friendly negro hand on board. Among their ports of departure were New Orleans, Mobile, Jacksonville, Savannah, Wilmington, North Carolina, Portsmouth and Norfolk, Virginia,

and Baltimore. They landed at Portland, Newburyport, Marblehead, Salem, Boston, Plymouth, some town or other on Cape Cod, Wareham, New Bedford, Fall River, Newport, Providence, and the Connecticut ports of Norwich, Deep River, New Haven, and Greenwich.<sup>1</sup>

In all of these landing places the runaways were doubtless inclined to linger if they found friends and employment, but many were forwarded inland from one Underground centre to another until they were widely scattered through the towns and villages of Massachusetts and the adjoining states. However, many others were not content until they had found refuge in Canada, the slaves' "promised land."

The idea of freedom in Canada seems to have been diffused among the slaves by Southern soldiers returning home at the close of the War of 1812, and in the course of time it found expression in a number of slave songs. Among these probably the best known is "Away to Canada," of which one stanza will suffice to illustrate the cherished theme:

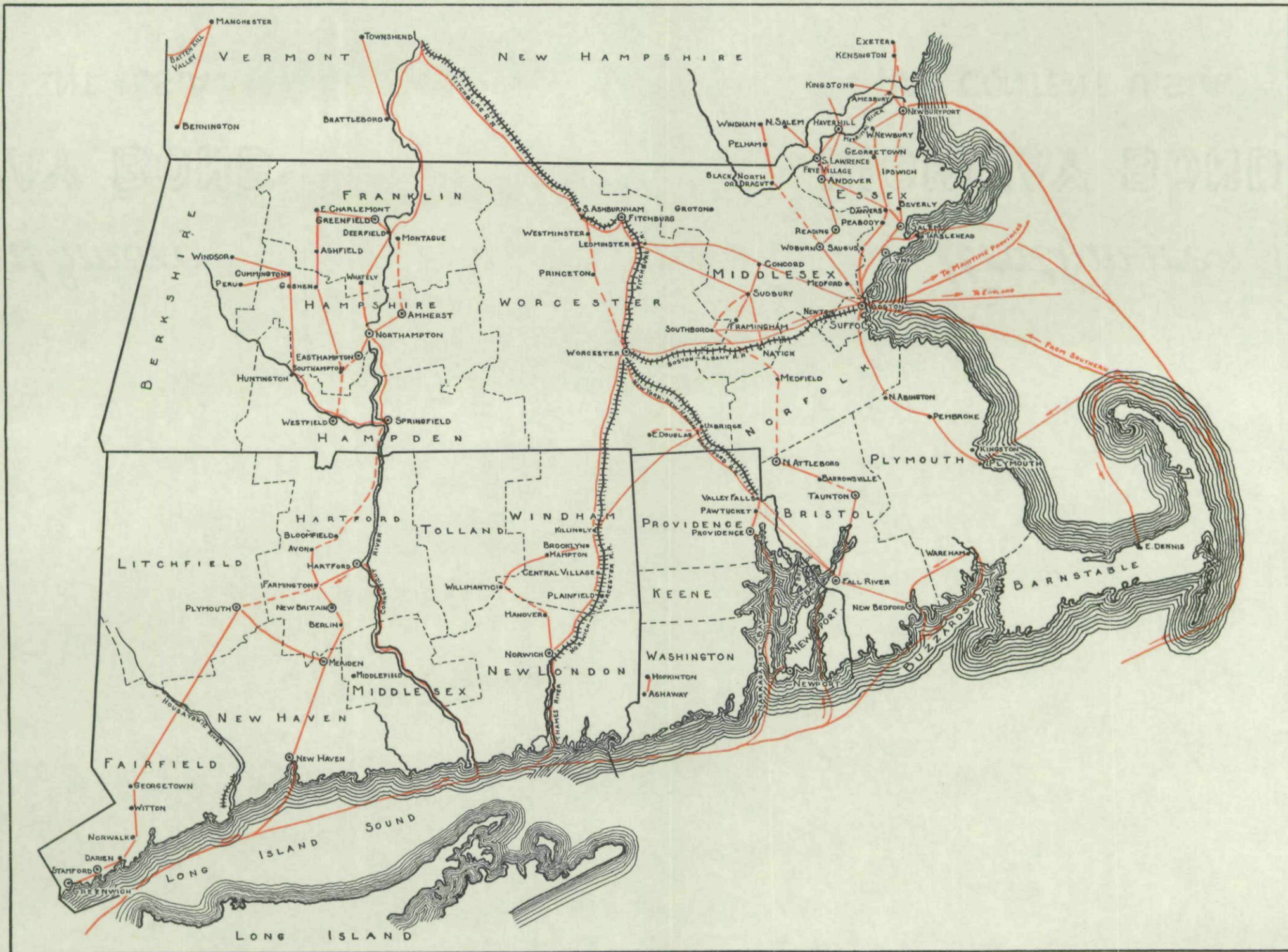
I've served my master all my days  
 Without a dime's reward,  
 And now I'm forced to run away  
 To flee the lash abhorred.  
 The hounds are baying on my track—  
 The master's just behind,  
 Resolved that he will bring me back  
 Before I cross the line.  
 Farewell old master,  
 Don't come after me,  
 I'm on my way to Canada  
 Where colored men are free.<sup>2</sup>

But numbers of the runaways remained in New England in comparative peace and contentment until

<sup>1</sup>See map, in W. H. Siebert's *Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*, facing p. 113; also the map accompanying this study.

<sup>2</sup>Henry Bibb's paper, *The Voice of the Fugitive*, file of 1851-2, Library of the University of Michigan; *Dalhousie Review*, Jan., 1896, p. 531.







the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 sent them in a mad rush for Canada.

The first recorded evidence of befriending the runaway in Massachusetts, in a manner often employed later by Underground operators, occurred shortly after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. This runaway had been apprehended, and Josiah Quincy appeared in court as his defender. Mr. Quincy tells us that he "heard a noise, and turning round he saw the constable lying on the floor, and a passage opening through the crowd, through which the fugitive was taking his departure without stopping to hear the opinion of the court."<sup>1</sup>

#### NEW BEDFORD AS A CENTRE FOR FUGITIVE SLAVES

The case of the fugitive slave Randolph, which was tried at the October term of the state Supreme Court in 1823, is interesting to us because it shows that runaways were being brought into New Bedford at least as early as 1819. Randolph was a fugitive from Virginia, had prospered in the Quaker town and bought a house there. An agent and a deputy sheriff, in search of the slave, were told by the United States district judge that they needed no warrant for his arrest. They appeared at New Bedford and attacked and seized the negro. Attorney General Morton and two assistants, who represented the commonwealth, claimed that Randolph was entitled to the rights of a free man until legally proved to be a slave, that the law of 1793 was unconstitutional, and that in any event it did not authorize his seizure without some legal process. But the majority of the judges held against them.<sup>2</sup>

The adverse decision did not prevent the Quakers of New Bedford from continuing to extend hospitality to runaways. According to a letter of February 28, 1846,

<sup>1</sup>*Boston Globe*, Sept. 15, 1900.

<sup>2</sup>*Pickering's Reports*, p. 11.



written by John Bailey to Mr. Garrison, they were arriving every week, among them a negro claiming to be from the South but last from Boston, who said that Mr. Garrison had paid a week's board for him and his passage to New Bedford, and a negress, who claimed to have been loaned a bonnet and shawl and sent by Amarancy Paine. Mr. Bailey asserted that the number of applicants for relief drew heavily on the resources of the local abolitionists, who now and then suspected an impostor. Hence he had written about these persons, but had received no reply. He suggested that fugitive slaves bring certificates of identification from their friends in the border states. Among the noted runaway slaves who lived for longer or shorter periods in New Bedford was Henry Box Brown. He paid a friend in Richmond, Virginia, where he was employed, \$166 to help him escape by nailing him up in a box and shipping him to Philadelphia. There he was given money and forwarded to Boston, whence he passed on to New Bedford, living there a few weeks before returning to Boston and writing an account of his life in slavery and his escape.<sup>1</sup>

By 1851 the colored inhabitants of New Bedford numbered between six hundred and seven hundred. In the early morning of March 16 of that year, the town was deeply stirred by the news, brought by two men from Boston, that a vessel bearing deputy United States marshals and one hundred armed men had left Charlestown Navy Yard for New Bedford, or some neighboring port, for the purpose of taking up fugitive slaves. One of the two couriers was the express rider of the town, who reported the vessel to be J. H. Pearson's brig *Acorn*. The report took on a more ominous hue when a strange vessel was discovered in the bay. Thereupon the bell on Liberty Hall was tolled, a large crowd quickly assembled and agreed what measures to take in case action should become necessary, while the colored people resolved to live or die together. The

<sup>1</sup>*Liberator*, Mar. 20, 1846; *Narrative of Henry Box Brown*, pp. 58, 64.

appalling fear that the new Fugitive Slave Law was about to be executed in a wholesale manner laid hold of these people, and created a great stir among them for several weeks. On April 21, 1851, the *Mercury* announced under the caption "Extradition Extraordinary" that "a very large number of fugitive slaves," aided by many of the wealthiest and most respectable citizens of New Bedford, had left for Canada, and that more were preparing for their departure. The *Mercury* added that the utmost sympathy and liberality for this class of the inhabitants prevailed.<sup>1</sup>

New Bedford, as an Underground centre, had terminals both in the South and the North. One of its terminals in the South was Portsmouth, Virginia. At that place lived a colored woman by the name of Eliza Bains, who worked for sea-captains. Thus she became conversant with the times of sailing and the destinations of their vessels. Being also a hider of escaping slaves, she got numbers of them on board vessels bound for New Bedford and Boston. Among those attempting flight from Portsmouth in May, 1854, were Clarissa Davis and her two brothers. The brothers succeeded in reaching New Bedford, but Clarissa found it necessary to stay hidden for two months longer. Then she sailed for Philadelphia, whence the Vigilance Committee promptly forwarded her to join her brothers. Soon their father came and was reunited with his children. In fact, the Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia sent a number of fugitives to New Bedford, among them being Thomas Bayne, who became a dentist and a member of the city council there.<sup>2</sup> For a couple of years Frederick Douglass was a member of the colony of fugitives at New Bedford. Early in September, 1838, he had departed by train from Baltimore in sailor costume, with a paper called a "sailor's protection," for Philadelphia and New York. In the latter city Lewis and Arthur Tappan and one or two

<sup>1</sup>Special to the *Commonwealth*, Mar. 16, 1851; *History of New Bedford, Mass.*, 306.

<sup>2</sup>Wm. Still, *Underground Railroad*, 60, 61, 165, 225, 257, 274-5, 335.



other abolitionists, who were also "high officials" of the Underground Railroad, took an interest in him and decided that it would be safer for him in New Bedford than in the metropolis. Thither he went and became friendly with a colored man, Nathan Johnson, who had just been reading Scott's "Lady of the Lake." This suggested to Johnson a name for his new friend, whose name in slavery had been Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey; thus Bailey became Frederick Douglass. In the summer of 1841, Frederick attended a great anti-slavery convention at Nantucket, which he was asked to address. The deep impression he made upon that body by his oratory led to his accepting a position with the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society as a platform speaker.<sup>1</sup>

New Bedford received some of its fugitives also from Wareham, another *entrepot* for such travelers, which lies on the coast about fifteen miles to the northeast.

The exodus of the refugees from New Bedford in the spring of 1851 was by way of the Underground Railroad, which doubtless included, by reason of the emergency, the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad. If one had access to the treasurers' books of the two flourishing anti-slavery societies of New Bedford, one founded in 1834 and the other in 1836, one might learn some interesting facts about that exodus. But the regular Underground route extended from New Bedford thirteen miles northwest to Fall River. This town had been since the 1830's an important centre for forwarding the runaways. Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Buffum Chace, Samuel Curry and other residents were engaged in the work, and when the Chaces removed, in 1839, to Valley Falls, Rhode Island (now the city of Central Falls), their commodious house on the corner of Hunt and Broad streets became a widely known Underground station. Robert Adams, an energetic conductor at Fall River, often

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<sup>1</sup>Booker T. Washington, *Frederick Douglass*, 59-60, 63-65, 70, 72.

brought his passengers there in a closed carriage at night, but sometimes took them to Pawtucket, a little distance north of Providence. Both Pawtucket and Providence disposed of their incoming refugees by sending them directly north to the Underground agents at Valley Falls. One of the hiding-places at Pawtucket was the large barn of Ira Pidge and his son, James S. Pidge, then standing on what is now known as Pidge Avenue. Negroes were often directed thither by friendly Quakers.<sup>1</sup>

One evening Mr. Adams brought to the Chaces a fine-looking negro, disguised in Quaker garb and thick veil. He had escaped from Virginia with his wife and child to New Bedford. Nearly a year later his master and a constable had come from Boston to take the family, but were prevented by quick action. The woman and her child were evidently concealed at once, while her husband was disguised and placed in charge of Mr. Adams. When the negro reached Valley Falls, Mr. Chace put him in care of the conductor of the early morning train on the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad for transfer at Worcester to the Fitchburg line. Thus he was sent on to Canada through Vermont. Later the other members of the family were forwarded.<sup>2</sup>

Another time the passengers escorted by Mr. Adams were two young men who had come as stowaways on the same trading vessel to Wareham, where a colored woman was the person to whom they were directed. Another group conveyed to Valley Falls by Mr. Adams, consisted of a mother and two of her three children. She had fled from Maryland and become a laundress in Fall River. On the appearance of an officer from Boston in the town, it was thought best to send them on to the Chaces, even though a son, older than the other two children, could not accompany

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<sup>1</sup>*Pawtucket Times*, Dec. 3, 1934.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth B. Chace, *Anti-Slavery Reminiscences* (pamphlet).



them at once. However, they stayed with the Chaces several days until he came. Then Mr. Chace went on the train with them part way to Worcester, giving instructions to the knowing conductor to pass them on through Vermont.<sup>1</sup>

Pawtucket is a little distance north of Providence and only five miles south of Valley Falls. At the southern extremity of this line lies Newport, where Jethro and Anne Mitchell and other Quakers cared for the fugitives landing from vessels which put in there. These fugitives were instructed how to find Daniel Mitchell in the city of Providence. Doubtless he was associated with other abolitionists in assisting those directed to him.<sup>2</sup>

#### UNDERGROUND ROUTES FROM FALL RIVER

From Fall River northward there were two other Underground routes besides the one through Vermont by way of Valley Falls and Worcester. One ran nineteen miles up to Barrowsville (Norton Post Office), where from 1850 to 1854 the Rev. Solomon P. Snow maintained a station. As his parish was an Underground centre, its activities cannot be supposed to have been limited to the term of his pastorate. The next link was only seven miles, being to Attleboro, where the Kling house was a station. A few miles south of North Attleboro the Rev. Seth Chaplin lived in a two-story frame house on the west side of the road from 1830 to 1833 and harbored fugitives there. At Medfield, fifteen miles to the north and a few miles to the west, the Rev. Luther Lee and Joseph A. Allen were the operators.

The other Underground route running north from Fall River took its course up Taunton River fourteen miles to Taunton, thence connecting with Barrowsville,

<sup>1</sup>Elizabeth B. Chace, *Anti-Slavery Reminiscences* (pamphlet).

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

seven miles to the northwest. At Taunton the home of Elijah and Jerusha Bird was a station, for they were ardent abolitionists and humanitarians.<sup>1</sup>

THE EASTERN CONNECTICUT UNDERGROUND  
RAILROAD

A tributary line entered Massachusetts southeast of Worcester from eastern Connecticut. The travelers on this route had sailed up the Thames River to Norwich, where some of them were afforded rapid transit by train on the Norwich and Worcester (New York and New England) Railroad, while others were in need of nothing better than the much slower regulation service, with its way-station accommodations at Hanover, Canterbury, and Brooklyn; or they might be sent northwest from Hanover to Willimantic, thence northeast to Hampton and so to Brooklyn. In the early 1830's, the Rev. Samuel J. May was living at Brooklyn and maintained an understanding with Effingham L. Capron at Uxbridge, Massachusetts, to provide shelter and guidance for Underground passengers. Some of these evidently stopped first at East Douglass. In that case they received considerate treatment at the hands of Solomon P. Snow, who for a few years was the pastor of the Wesleyan Methodist Church there. One evening in 1849, while the Snow children were at home alone, a stalwart negro came to the house and frightened them badly. He was fleeing from pursuers, who had fired at him and wounded him in the hand. The parents returned soon, cared for and fed their visitor and sent him on to Uxbridge, which lies five miles to the east. From Uxbridge the distance to Worcester is sixteen miles, northwest. Being a strong anti-slavery community, Worcester was the lode-star for fugitive slaves in that region.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter from M. S. Snow, Apr. 11, 1896; letter from Lucy M. Davis, Aug. 13, 1896; letter from Jos. A. Allen, Aug. 16, 1896; *Old Anti-Slavery Days* (Danvers, Mass., Aug. 16, 1893), 133-134; letters from Miss M. Emma Burt, Apr. 12 and May 16, 1935.

<sup>2</sup>S. J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict*, 297; letter from M. S. Snow, Apr. 11, 1896; *Fourth Annual Report*, American Anti-Slavery Society, (1837), p. 128.



## WORCESTER AS AN UNDERGROUND CENTRE

From early in 1836 the southern part of Worcester County had its anti-slavery society, as also the northern part, while that of the city of Worcester dated from March, 1835. A bewildered fugitive could find friends almost anywhere in the county. Too often, however, we do not know the names of the persons who made a practice of harboring slaves. Among the many Quakers of the city we know only Edward Earle. The Hon. George F. Hoar was of the opinion that Charles Hadwen, another Quaker, who dwelt at some distance from any traveled road a little way out of Worcester, kept a refuge for the wayfarers. In 1847 Stephen Foster and his wife, Abby Kelly Foster, bought a farm at the foot of Paxton Hills in Tatnuck, a part of the suburbs of the city. There they lived for twenty-five years and sheltered fugitives until the outbreak of the Civil War, from which fact their place became known as "the Liberty Farm." The cellar of their house was divided by a brick wall, which was pierced by two doors. One of the halves of the cellar consisted of two rooms, in one of which was a closet at the side of which was a secret vault, five by ten feet in size. The only entrance to this vault was a trap-door in the floor of the room above. It was in this vault that the Fosters usually secreted their negro guests. When Thomas Wentworth Higginson settled in Worcester as the pastor of the "Free Church," which was an important factor in the local anti-slavery activities, he kept an Underground station and drove out at night with his runaways to "Liberty Farm."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Higginson tells us in his "Cheerful Yesterdays" that the most curious case he had to deal with was that of a pretty, young woman, Abbey Green, apparently white, "with two perfectly white children," who had been consigned to him by the Rev. Samuel May, then secretary of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society,

<sup>1</sup>Scrapbook in Library of the Bostonian Society, Old State House, Boston.

who entrusted them to be taken by the Boston and Albany train to "a Worcester merchant, thoroughly proslavery in sympathy, and not having the slightest conception that he was violating the laws in finding a seat for his charge and holding the baby on his knee." Abbey and her children remained with the Higginsons all winter, and finally she married a tradesman near Boston.<sup>1</sup>

The Rev. Hiram K. Wilson, a Worcester man, went to the region of Ontario on the east side of the Detroit River as a missionary among the fugitive slaves, and in the winter of 1856 took a census of them. He reported their number at 35,000.<sup>2</sup> By 1860 it was said that they had increased by 10,000, which was probably too low an estimate. Many others entered Canada across the Detroit and Niagara rivers and at Ogdensburg, New York, while the hundreds who traversed the New England states settled at Stanstead, St. Johns and Montreal, in the province of Quebec. A few were sent to the Maritime Provinces and to England.<sup>3</sup>

#### UNSEEN HIGHWAYS IN THE NORTHERN PART OF WORCESTER COUNTY

The northern part of Worcester County had "a number of unseen highways" which were established by Deacon Joshua T. Everett, of Westminster or Everettville, and other abolitionists. Unfortunately Mr. Everett has left no description or map of these routes. One of them evidently ran from Worcester twenty-one miles west of north to Westminster, whence the passengers could be transferred six miles north-eastward to Fitchburg, or eight miles northwestward to North Ashburnham. Among those brought to

<sup>1</sup>Letter from J. S. Rogers, Apr. 17, 1897; letter from Ann E. Samon, no date; letter from Hon. G. F. Hoar, Nov. 18, 1896; letters from T. W. Higginson, Feb. 3, 1893, and Jul. 24, 1896; *Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1897, pp. 348-9.

<sup>2</sup>*Anti-Slavery Tracts*, No. 4, N. S. (1860), p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>*Seward at Washington as Senator and Secretary of State [etc.]*, 1846-1861, I, 169.



Westminster from a station farther south was a comely young woman, about thirty years old and almost white, who closely resembled a neighbor of the Everetts. Other neighbors were invited in to see her, after which she was detained only long enough to be given her dinner and some articles of needed clothing.<sup>1</sup>

Another route through the northern section of Worcester County was the extension of one from Fall River, which passed through the Attleboros to Medfield, thence fourteen miles southwest to Southborough and probably from there northeast to Concord, another fourteen miles. There may have been a branch from Medfield direct to Boston. At Southborough the Whitneys and their son, later the Rev. Daniel S. Whitney, were operators. Concord was a notable Underground centre, the work there being managed by Mr. and Mrs. Francis E. Bigelow, Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Brooks, Miss Mary E. Rice, and Ephraim Allen, with E. Bronson Alcott and Henry D. Thoreau as occasional participants. The Wheelers, grandparents of Mary C. Wheeler, artist and educator, should not be left out of this list. They were "extreme abolitionists," intimate friends of the Brookses, and their house was a haven for fugitive slaves.<sup>2</sup>

In February, 1847, Mr. Alcott noted in his diary the departure of a fugitive from his home for Canada after a week's employment in sawing and piling wood and "with the means of journeying." The fugitive declined to remain longer because he felt that freedom in New England was unsafe. Moncure D. Conway, who had left his home in Virginia on account of his anti-slavery views and was living in Concord, tells of having called one morning at the house of Henry D. Thoreau and found the family excited over the arrival at daybreak of a slave, who had to be assured that

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<sup>1</sup>*Old Anti-Slavery Days* (Danvers Historical Society, 1893), p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Ann E. Damon, no date; *Old Anti-Slavery Days*, 91-2; Blanche E. Wheeler Williams, *Mary C. Wheeler, Leader in Art and Education*, pp. 19, 22-23.

Mr. Conway was a friend. Thoreau was most attentive to the fugitive's condition and needs and gave up his intended walk with his friend in order to guard the house against slave-hunters.<sup>1</sup>

The Bigelows, in particular, welcomed many refugees to their home, among them Shadrach, who was brought in a carriage at half-past three in the morning by Lewis Hayden and a companion from Boston. During the few days Shadrach remained in Concord, the Brookes assisted in caring for him, and when he departed with Mr. Bigelow for the house of Jonathan Drake in Leominster, twenty miles north of west, his head covering was one of Mr. Brooks's old silk hats. They drove up to the Drakes on a Sunday morning, in February, 1851, affording the hostess the opportunity of taking Shadrach to church. She had him don feminine apparel, including a bonnet, and introduced him to her friends as "Mrs. Brown." The home of the Drakes was much frequented by runaways, but the Rev. Joel S. Bingham and Joel Smith also kept Underground stations in Leominster. Four miles northwest is Fitchburg, where Mr. and Mrs. Samuel S. Crocker, Benjamin S. Snow, and others rendered similar service. The night that Shadrach arrived in Fitchburg, Mr. Crocker sent one of his workmen with a horse and conveyance to take him on to the house of Alvin Ward, in North Ashburnham. Thereafter the horse became widely known by the name "Shadrach," although he hauled many other fugitives. On account of sickness the fugitive slave Shadrach remained some time in Mr. Ward's attic before being able to proceed to Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Among the Underground passengers who arrived in Fitchburg from Boston, were one Williams, his wife, and two step-daughters. Williams had been manu-

<sup>1</sup>F. B. Sanborn, *Henry D. Thoreau*, 195; Edward W. Emerson, *Henry Thoreau, as Remembered by a Young Friend*, 68.

<sup>2</sup>C. F. Adams, *Life of Richard H. Dana, Jr.*, I, 216-7; letter from F. B. Sanborn, Feb. 1, 1896; letter from Mrs. S. S. Crocker, no date; Capt. Austin Bearse, *Reminiscences of Fugitive Slave Law Days in Boston*, 37-8.



mitted in Kentucky, but the women were fugitives from Virginia. Mrs. Williams had married her husband in the North, and the family had lived in Boston until impelled to leave by the renditions following the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. At Fitchburg Mr. Crocker fitted up for their use a cabin which stood on his land. They all found employment and occupied the cabin until the capture of Anthony Burns in Boston destroyed their sense of security. Then they and others of their race fled from Fitchburg for Canada.<sup>1</sup>

The Burns affair was the occasion of the meeting of a few abolitionists in Concord on the evening of July 9, 1854. Those present were: Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mr. and Mrs. John Thoreau, Miss Mary E. Rice, Charles Bowers, Joshua R. Brown, Nathan B. Stow, Nathan Henry Warren, James Weir, Stearns Wheeler, and William Whiting. Mr. Whiting presided and went directly to the point by asking the company whether, in case an escaping slave should appear at their door, they would shelter and otherwise aid him. They were of one accord in declaring their readiness to do so.<sup>2</sup>

Twenty miles northwest of Concord lies Groton, which is eleven miles north of east of Fitchburg. Its anti-slavery character is vouched for by the fact that it had a men's society from October, 1834, and a women's from March, 1836. There can scarcely be a doubt that it maintained Underground connections with both Fitchburg and Concord. So far as is known the first fugitive slave to stop in Groton came in the winter of 1836-37. He was cared for by Dr. Amos Farnsworth, who forwarded him to Canada in the spring. Dr. Farnsworth had received his M.D. from the Harvard Medical School in 1813, practiced his profession in Boston for twelve years, and in 1832 had settled in Groton where he became active in the anti-slavery cause. Other fugitives, who came from Valley

<sup>1</sup>Article by Mrs. Crocker, in the *Fitchburg Daily Sentinel*, Oct. 31, 1888.

<sup>2</sup>John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*, II, 142.

Falls, Rhode Island, were sheltered in Groton by the Rev. Solomon S. Young.<sup>1</sup>

## II

### BOSTON AND ITS UNDERGROUND ROUTES TO 1850

#### BOSTON AS A RENDEZVOUS FOR FUGITIVES

No town on the entire New England coast received a larger number of fugitive slaves than Boston. Most of them came as stowaways on vessels from Southern ports, and some from Plymouth and perhaps other shore towns south of Boston where they had landed. The notoriety gained by Boston from 1830 onward by the anti-slavery movement originating there became more or less known among the slaves of the Atlantic seaboard, hundreds of whom had the courage and intelligence to conceal themselves on coasting vessels bound for Boston. In many more instances than will ever be known they also had the help of Southern friends, both whites and blacks.

In 1842 an assembly met in Marlborough Chapel, in Boston, to plan the rescue of George W. Latimer from the Leverett Street jail. Latimer and his wife had escaped from slavery in Norfolk, Virginia, by steamboat to Boston and had been in hiding with colored persons living on Joy Street, but he had been taken by his pursuers and was likely to be returned to the South. The meeting in the chapel was attended by twenty-five determined men from Lynn. Rather than risk a rescue Latimer's master consented to accept \$400 for his slave, and that sum was promptly collected by the Rev. Mr. Colwell and Deacon Timothy Gilbert. This joyous news terminated the proceedings in Marlborough Chapel, and the crowd dispersed.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Dr. Helen Morton, May 1, 1896; *Fourth Annual Report, American Anti-Slavery Society*, 127; letter from Mary E. Hall, Jan. 13, 1897; *Groton Historical Series*, I; letter from Mrs. Mary E. Hall, Jan. 13, 1897.



Latimer long feared being kidnapped and for a while spent his time in various Underground retreats, but at length he settled in Lynn and there abode until his death, May 28, 1896.<sup>1</sup>

Occasionally a fugitive who reached Boston Harbor had the misfortune to be carried back to the South. Such was the fate of a slave who had secreted himself on board the brig *Ottoman*, owned by John H. Pierson, and arrived early in September, 1846, from New Orleans. Being discovered, he was placed on a pilot boat for safe keeping. Meantime the captain of the *Ottoman* arranged with the bark *Niagara*, soon to sail for New Orleans, to take him back. The slave was landed on an island in the harbor, whence he escaped in a boat to South Boston Point. He was pursued and captured by the captain and in a few days was a prisoner in the *Niagara*, which eluded the boat sent for his rescue and carried him back to slavery.

The incident was reported to the abolitionists in Boston, who held a crowded indignation meeting in Faneuil Hall over which John Quincy Adams presided. In his brief address he declared that it was a question whether or not Massachusetts was to maintain its independence, or was capable of protecting the men who were under its laws. Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe stated the facts in the case, and John A. Andrew presented some resolutions, declaring it to be the first duty of all governments to guarantee the safety of every individual on their soil, and that the abduction of a man from Boston should be felt as an alarming menace to the safety and personal rights of every citizen. These resolutions were unanimously adopted, after which the meeting was addressed by Charles Sumner, Stephen C. Phillips, Theodore Parker, and Wendell Phillips. Among other things, Wendell Phillips said, "Law or no law, constitution or no constitution, humanity shall be paramount. I would

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<sup>1</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript*, Sept. 1, 1897; letter from John W. Hutchinson, no date.

send out a voice from Faneuil Hall that would reach every hovel in South Carolina and say to the slave, 'Come here, and find an asylum of freedom here, where no talon of the national eagle shall ever snatch you away.' " From Concord Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote that he "felt the irreparable blame to Boston of the abduction."

Some Boston men felt as did Mr. Emerson and formed a Vigilance Committee of forty members "to secure the protection of the laws to all persons" who might be in danger of suffering the fate of the unknown slave. This committee met for the first time at the home of Dr. Henry I. Bowditch, No. 8 Otis Place, on the evening of September 30, 1846. Dr. Howe was its president and the committee gave its unanimous approval to Mr. Andrew's resolutions. If it functioned later there seems to be no record of the fact. Perhaps it was transformed into the Defensive League of Freedom, whose membership was the same and whose object was made more practical. That object was to protect fugitive slaves who in case of arrest must depend upon the "voluntary unremunerated service" of the persons willing to defend them. Those aiding fugitives were also liable to prosecution and heavy penalties. Such cases had occurred and were likely to occur again. Hence the league considered the aider of fugitives to be proper subjects for assistance whenever they needed defense and deserved indemnification, but it had no intention of resisting the execution of the law by force, or of conducting a crusade into the Southern states for the purpose of freeing slaves.<sup>1</sup>

Persons could join the league by signing its constitution, paying the entrance fee of one dollar, and subscribing a sum to the defense fund. Five per cent a year of the amount subscribed was collectable if needed. The charter members were Dr. Howe, John A. Andrew, Ellis Gray Loring of Brookline, the Rev. James Free-

<sup>1</sup>Henry Wilson, *Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, II, 54-5; *Boston Post*, June 2, 1896; Pamphlets—Fugitive Slave Law (in the Boston Public Library).



man Clarke of Roxbury, Dr. Samuel Cabot, Jr., and Henry J. Prentiss. The officers and central committee of the league were to be elected at its annual meeting. This committee was made up of one member from every county in Massachusetts, the officers, and five other members chosen at large. Its business was to call meetings and manage the affairs of the league, obtain subscriptions throughout the state, and collect and distribute the fund. Five members of the committee constituted a quorum to transact business. These matters were set forth in a pamphlet, which seems to have been widely distributed. The persons to whom it was directed were requested to transmit their names and addresses and the entrance fee and specify the amount of their subscription. When the answers had been received, a meeting would be held to complete the organization.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately we have no later records of the Defensive League of Freedom, which had laid out for itself a definite and useful field of operation.

Historically, the Vigilance Committee of 1846 is significant as being the forerunner of another and much larger committee of the same name in Boston, which came into being immediately after the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and devoted itself for more than a decade, with astonishing success, to nullifying that law in all parts of Massachusetts, but especially in the eastern part of the state.

This second Vigilance Committee employed Captain Austin Bearse as its principal agent in rescuing fugitives from coasting vessels in Boston Harbor. However, the first slave brought to the city by Mr. Bearse came in his yacht *Moby Dick* from Albany, New York, in the summer of 1847. In the previous autumn George Lewis, a slave, had escaped from City Point, Virginia, to Washington, D. C., where his daughter Lizzie concealed him in the attic of her mistress until the

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<sup>1</sup>Pamphlets—Fugitive Slave Law, *op. cit.*

following April. He then traveled by the Underground Railroad to Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Albany. At Albany the Misses Mott hid him in the outskirts of the city until they could send him to Boston, where Lizzie was now a refugee in the house of one Thacker, on Southac (later Phillips) Street. When Captain Bearse anchored at the Albany wharf, the Mott sisters entrusted Lewis to him, and in due time the reunion of father and daughter was accomplished. During the next three years Lewis worked in Samuel Hall's shipyard, in East Boston, and his wife and five daughters were purchased with money raised by the negro preacher, Leonard A. Grimes, one of Boston's prominent Underground agents. The family continued in the city until the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law, when the new Vigilance Committee paid their passage to Nova Scotia because they were afraid of being abducted.<sup>1</sup>

There can be no question that for some years past the number of fugitive slaves had been rapidly increasing in the Northern states. In January, 1848, the *Sixteenth Annual Report* of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society stated that "the ranks of emigration from the South" were yearly swelling their numbers, and "in spite of the terrors of the law" resistance had been repeatedly made to the recapture of slaves, and in one case had terminated in the death of one of the "kidnappers." In the same year Oliver Cromwell Gilbert and fifteen other slaves escaped from Howard County, Maryland, and passed through Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Gilbert himself, if not others of the company, reached Boston, where he was received into the home of Deacon Timothy Gilbert.<sup>2</sup>

In January, 1850, the *Eighteenth Annual Report* of the same society declared that the tide which had been flowing "for so many years, but especially since

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<sup>1</sup>Capt. Austin Bearse, *Reminiscences of Fugitive Slave Law Days in Boston*, 11-12.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from M. M. Fisher, March 23, 1893.



the inception of the Anti-slavery enterprise, from the South to the North, of the slave population," continued to pour in a swelling flood, in spite of the masters. The love of freedom proved to be stronger than the fear of death, and "dangers in the most frightful shapes" had been dared to achieve liberty. This was one of the triumphs of the abolitionists. Where one slave had made a successful escape in 1830, probably fifty were making them now. In Massachusetts and other Northern states an attempt at recapture was unheard of, and none had been made for more than seven years. The fact seemed to have become established "that the trouble and expense of reclaiming a slave who had reached one of the New England states" was more than he was worth. This result had been produced by the abolitionists. "Had it not been for their incessant importunity, the jail of Boston would still be, as it was in former years, as freely used for the detention of fugitives, as that of Richmond or of Washington."

On January 1, 1831, the first number of the *Liberator* had appeared, being printed in one of the upper rooms of Merchants Hall, which stood on the northeast corner of Congress and Water streets. Of that place James Russell Lowell wrote:

In a small chamber, friendless and unseen,  
Toiled o'er his types one poor, unlearned young man;  
The place was dark, unfurnished and mean;  
Yet there the freedom of a race began.<sup>1</sup>

The room over the *Liberator* office, at No. 21 Cornhill, was used as a temporary hiding-place of a few of the numerous fugitives arriving in Boston, and some of the prominent white men and women of the city also extended hospitality to them, perforce in as secretive a manner as possible. The Rev. James

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<sup>1</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript*, Sept. 1, 1897; Henry F. Jenks, Scrapbook, in Library of the Bostonian Society, Old State House, Boston.

Freeman Clarke has said that there were many places in Boston where they were received and cared for. He adds that every anti-slavery man was ready to protect them, and that some families who were not known to be anti-slavery were not less ready to do so. He gives the instance of Mrs. George S. Hillard, who secreted them in the attic of her home, at No. 62 Pinckney Street, despite the fact that her husband was an ardent Webster Whig. The house was erected in 1846 and in the ell contained a closet, in the ceiling of which was a trap-door opening into an unfinished space under a slanting roof large enough to hold several persons. The ventilation came from an opening into a shaft under a skylight. That this was the place where Mrs. Hillard hid her seekers after freedom is attested by the fact that workmen found two tin plates and two iron spoons lying on the floor. Mr. Clarke tells us that his neighbor and friend, Mr. Hillard, was a United States commissioner, whose business it was to issue warrants to marshals for the capture of runaway slaves. He believed that Mr. Hillard knew of his wife's concealment of slaves, but that he never interfered.<sup>1</sup>

Francis Jackson reserved a room in his house, at No. 31 Hollis Street, for runaways and aided so many that "it would not be easy to number" them. William I. Bowditch kept a few in his house, in Brookline, most of whom he passed on to William Jackson, at Newton. In one instance, however, he and other abolitionists took the negro in a two-horse carryall to Concord and delivered him to Mrs. Mary M. Brooks. The house of the Southwicks in Boston—Joseph, his wife Thankful, and their daughter Sarah H.—is said to have been an important Underground station, although Miss Southwick does not refer to it in her reminiscences. Elizur Wright sometimes harbored fugitives in his house, including Henry Watson, who had come by vessel from Mississippi, his passage being

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<sup>1</sup>Rev. J. F. Clarke, *Anti-Slavery Days*, 83.



paid by the friendly colored steward. Later Watson was sent to England for a few months. Lydia Maria Child has recorded that the purse of Catherine Sargent "was always open to the fugitive slave."<sup>1</sup>

One must suppose that most of the fugitives arriving in Boston during the earlier years, as during the later, were harbored by the people of their own color, who lived on the north side of Beacon Hill, on "Nigger Hill" opposite the old West Church, which stood on the corner of Cambridge and Lynde streets, and in other localities where the negroes lived.

#### THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT IN MASSACHUSETTS

On July 4, 1829, in Park Street Church, William Lloyd Garrison gave his first anti-slavery address. In the following year in Julian Hall, on the northeast corner of Milk and Congress streets at the head of Federal, he delivered a course of three lectures against slavery, thereby gaining some notable followers, including the Rev. Samuel J. May, A. Bronson Alcott, and Samuel E. Sewall. On the evening of January 6, 1832, Garrison and eleven other men—the famous "twelve apostles"—organized the New England Anti-Slavery Society in the basement of a church which stood in Smith's Court, on Joy Street. The basement served as a schoolroom for colored children. As the twelve were about to separate, Garrison uttered these prophetic words:

We have met tonight in this obscure schoolhouse; our numbers are few and our influence limited, but mark my prediction, Faneuil Hall shall ere long echo with the principles we have set forth. We shall shake the nation by their mighty power.

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<sup>1</sup>*New England Magazine*, N. S., III, 442, 454; *In Memoriam. Testimonials to the Life and Character of the Late Francis Jackson* (Boston, 1861), p. 21; letter from Abbey Morton Diaz, no date; Capt. Austin Bearse, *Reminiscences of Fugitive Slave Law Days in Boston*, 34.

On July 4, six months later, the patriotic hymn of the Rev. Samuel F. Smith,

My country, 't is of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,

was sung in Park Street Church under the direction of Lowell Mason.

In 1836 the Supreme Court of Massachusetts rendered its decision in the noted case of the girl Med, who had been a slave in the West Indies and was brought to Boston by her mistress. Med's counsel argued for her freedom on the ground that slavery was not recognized by the laws of the commonwealth, while the counsel on the other side maintained that slaves were property by the law of nations, particularly as to the right to seize and carry them away. The court decided in favor of the defendant.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile anti-slavery societies were being formed throughout Massachusetts, one hundred and eighteen towns and cities having one or more of them by the year 1837.<sup>2</sup> Already the abolition of slavery had become a favorite theme for clergymen in Boston and many of the other towns, while newspapers in various communities of the commonwealth supported the movement. All this agitation was favorable to the spread of the Underground system, which was patronized more generously as slaves learned by the successful escapes of their fellows and the denunciation of Northern abolitionists by their masters that they might also reach a land of freedom. The map of Underground routes which accompanies these chapters is based upon data collected too late to be regarded as complete. Abolitionists, whether living in New England or other parts of the North, were well aware that written records of their midnight labors in forwarding fugitives towards Canada might bring drastic punishment upon their heads, and most of them refrained

<sup>1</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript*, Sept. 1, 1897; Henry F. Jenks, Scrapbook.

<sup>2</sup>*Fourth Annual Report*, American Anti-Slavery Society (1837), pp. 126-9.



from such folly. After slavery had been abolished a few revealed their secrets in published reminiscences, or their biographers did so for them. Anti-slavery newspapers contain an occasional item of value, as do also the printed reports of the anti-slavery societies and the legal reports of fugitive slave cases. Much more has been gleaned by correspondence with surviving abolitionists, members of their families, and their friends. The most remarkable contemporary document relating to Underground activities is the record book kept by Francis Jackson as the treasurer of the Boston Vigilance Committee during a period of more than ten years from early in October, 1850, to January 1, 1861. So far as known it stands in a class by itself.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE OUT-BOUND UNDERGROUND TRAFFIC LINES OF BOSTON

The out-bound Underground routes radiating by land from Boston were not less than five in number. Curiously enough, there was one which ran southeast to Plymouth, a distance of thirty-seven miles, which was sometimes used after 1850, if not before. It was the Plymouth and Middleboro (New York, New Haven and Hartford) Railroad. A few slaves were also landed at Plymouth and sent up to Boston. Mrs. Abby Morton Diaz recalled having seen one sitting on the back steps of her Uncle Nathaniel Morton's house and that he was escorted to Kingston on his way north. Another steam railroad, by which fugitives were transported seventy miles to Worcester, was the Boston and Albany. At Natick the mansion of Squire Edward Walcott, at No. 89 West Central Street, was a station which received fugitives from Boston by the same railroad. They were fed in the servants' kitchen, where they were often seen by the Walcott children,

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<sup>1</sup>W. H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad in Massachusetts*, two volumes (a collection of letters, printed articles, photographs of Underground operators and stations, etc.); Francis Jackson, *Treasurer's Book of the Boston Vigilance Committee*, in the Library of the Bostonian Society, Old State House, Boston.

and recently when the mansion was torn down the workmen discovered an arched, bricked tunnel about four feet high which extended from the sub-cellar out to the railroad embankment and appears to have served as a secret entrance for the runaways. Mr. Walcott sent or conducted his black guests to the house of Israel How Brown (now the property of Frank Morton), which stands about a half-mile north of the old Boston Post-road, opposite the cemetery of South Sudbury on the Lowell road. Mr. Brown had a market wagon, with high sides and a false bottom, on which he placed a bed of straw for his passengers. The wagon was then filled with garden produce for the Fitchburg market. He started on his trip of twenty-three miles at three o'clock, a. m., and was only once delayed by officers of the law. They discovered nothing, however, for they did not require him to unload. Mr. Brown is credited with having transported more than a hundred fugitives. Slightly north of the Boston and Albany Railroad was the carriage road through Newton and Framingham to Southborough, a distance of about twenty-four miles, which was used in several instances. The road to Concord, running northwestwardly sixteen miles, was shorter and much more frequented by the teams and closed carriages which conveyed the trembling passengers to that Underground haven. The next route was to Medford, where there were many friends of the runaway. Thence it extended to Woburn and finally crossed the Merrimac east of Lowell to Dracut or "Black North," which was a settlement of negroes not far from the New Hampshire boundary. A branch ran from Woburn to Reading, northeastward, which was on the main line to Andover, South Lawrence, and across to North Salem, in New Hampshire.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Miss Marion La Mere, March 15, 1935; letter from Mrs. Grace M. Richard, March, 1935; letter from Mrs. Diaz, no date; *Natick Herald*, March, 1930; *Wellesley Townsman*, same; letters from Mrs. Florence Lovell Macewen, Aug. 10 and 16, 1935; letter from Percival William Jones, Jul. 27, 1935.



Midway between Reading and Medford lies Stoneham, where the house at No. 307 Main Street bears a tablet with the inscription:

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

This House, the Home of Deacon Abijah Bryant,  
Harbored Many Fugitive Slaves  
In the Years Preceding the Civil War.<sup>1</sup>

In Stoneham also "the Newhall place," at the corner of Green Street where it makes its last turn north-eastward, is reputed to have been a station. In Woburn the Loring family cared for fugitives. Fifteen miles to the northwest is Dracut, which was settled by the emancipated slaves of wealthy landowners early in the eighteenth century. According to Mr. Fred Coburn, the historian of Chelmsford and Lowell, this settlement afforded shelter to the escaped slaves who passed that way. Their next stops were at Pelham and Windham, both in New Hampshire, the former being but four miles north of Dracut and the latter an equal distance farther on.

In Reading Jonas Parker secreted runaways in his large barn, on the corner of Ash and Cross streets. As a boy Cyrus K. Little several times saw at twilight two or three negroes, with little bundles on sticks over their shoulders, leave the Parker barn and turn northward. Mrs. Parker, who was Sally Bancroft before her marriage, was the vice-president of the Female Anti-Slavery Society, which had been formed in March, 1833, at the same time as the male society. Mr. Clinton L. Bancroft, president of the Reading Antiquarian Society, writes that for fifty years it has been rumored locally that a tunnel extended from the Parker tavern to the barn by which fugitives could pass back and forth, but he is skeptical that such a passage ever existed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter from Miss Marion La Mere, Jan. 25, 1935.

<sup>2</sup>Letters from Miss La Mere, Jan. 15, 25, and March 29, 1935; letter from Miss Mary J. Loring, Nov. 9, 1896; *Fourth Annual Report*, American Anti-Slavery Society, 128; letter from President Bancroft, Jan. 14, 1935.

From Reading the fugitives traveled some ten miles along the Boston-Haverhill Turnpike, crossing the Essex County line and reaching at length the estate of William Jenkins, who owned hundred of acres of farm and woodland. His large house, surrounded by commodious barns and outbuildings, was the principal Underground station of the countryside, and is said to have been in operation from the 1830's onward. In 1844 Mr. Jenkins withdrew from the South Church over the slavery question. Anti-slavery speakers were often guests in his house and Harriet Beecher Stowe was a frequent caller. Her husband was then a professor in the Theological Seminary at Andover, where Mrs. Stowe compiled her *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Andover is only three miles northwest of the Jenkins place, where fugitives were constantly going and coming, among them being George W. Latimer, who had an enduring dread of being captured. Fugitive slaves were living on the Jenkins estate as late as 1863. A few miles south of Andover Hill on the Reading road was the Cogswell house, which was an Underground station.

On the hill at Andover, almost within the shadow of the Seminary Chapel, stands a charming, white, colonial house of two stories, which was occupied by the Rev. Ralph Emerson from 1829 to 1853. He was Brown professor of ecclesiastical history and during the last eleven years of his stay in Andover president of the faculty, who, in 1834, tried to prevent a body of the students from joining an anti-slavery society. This caused sixty of them to withdraw, but it did not keep Professor Emerson from harboring fugitives in his house. Some of these fugitives came from Danvers, thirteen miles to the southeast. In 1853 Mr. Emerson removed to Newburyport.<sup>1</sup>

Among the last runaways to pass through Andover were a man and his sister who had come from Virginia,

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<sup>1</sup>Letters from Miss Marion La Mere, Nov. 25, 1934, and Dec. 9, 1935.



and were reported in the *Andover Advocate* of July 7, 1860, as having tarried long enough during the previous week to receive substantial aid from sympathizing friends.

Straight up the "pike" two miles north of Andover Hill was the thriving manufacturing centre of Frye Village, now Shawsheen Model Village of the American Woolen Company. There William Poor and his sons had a flourishing wagon factory, Elijah Hussey, a sawmill, and William C. Donald, an ink factory. Being pronounced abolitionists, these men had separated from South Church and organized the Free Christian Church in 1846. The Donalds, Poors, Fryes, John Dover, and John and Peter Smith—all members of the new church—contributed generously to the fund for fugitive slaves. William C. Donald, Elijah Hussey, Joseph W. Poor, and perhaps others could be counted on to speed the black wayfarers on their journey. When Mr. Poor heard a gentle rap on his door or other subdued sound in the night, he dressed quickly, went out, harnessed his mare Nellie into a covered wagon and started with his dusky passengers, probably for North Salem, New Hampshire. On the top of a hill at that place were several large excavations, lined and covered with slabs of stone, which had furnished retreats for the neighboring inhabitants when the Indians were on the warpath, but which now afforded refuge to fugitive slaves. Mr. Poor was always back in time for breakfast.<sup>1</sup>

A little north of Frye Village, in what is now South Lawrence, Daniel Saunders kept a way-station in his house near the falls bridge over the Merrimac River, and near the junction of the old Salem, New Hampshire, Turnpike with the Londonderry-Boston Turnpike.<sup>2</sup>

The Underground workers at Frye Village disliked

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Miss Marion La Mere, Nov. 25, 1934; letter from the Rev. William C. Poor to Miss La Mere; M. B. Dorgan, *History of Lawrence, Mass.*

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Miss Marion La Mere, Apr. 4, 1935.

to keep their passengers over for a day or more, preferring to hurry them on. Nor did they always take them to North Salem, in view of the fact that there were stations in and near Haverhill, eight miles to the northeastward. On Summer Street, near the bridge over the Merrimac at Haverhill, stands the house once occupied by David P. Harmon, who was a forwarder of fugitives, probably to Plaistow, New Hampshire, only five miles distant. Outside of Haverhill, at the corner of Savoy road and Saunders Hill in what was then called Nicholsville, was the home of Daniel Hoyt, whither John Greenleaf Whittier sometimes brought the seekers of freedom from Amesbury, eight miles to the northeast.<sup>1</sup>

A fourth line of fugitive travel out of Boston ran some eight miles north to Saugus, where Benjamin Franklin Newhall and his wife Dorothy befriended the wayfarers. The next station on this line was South Danvers (now Peabody), where Dr. Andrew Nichols, a graduate of the Harvard Medical School and head of the Free Soil Party in Danvers, extended hospitality to refugees, as well as to anti-slavery lecturers. His house now stands on Main Street near the square, back of the Essex Club. His tombstone in Monumental Cemetery, at Peabody, bears the inscription, "Erected by the Friends of Humanity to Humanity's Friend." At Danversport, formerly called "The Neck," the daughter of John Page, Esq., of Danvers, and wife of Dr. Ebenezer Hunt, once a candidate of the Liberty Party for lieutenant governor, gave "the strength and grace of her womanhood to the service of the poor and oppressed." As anti-slavery societies early took shape in Danvers, it became an Underground centre with a group of workers, including Mr. and Mrs. D. Brooks Baker, who lived in a cottage that stood at the corner of Elm and Putnam streets.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letters from Miss Marion La Mere, Nov. 25, 1934 and Apr. 4, 1935; Rev. Sherlock Bristol, *The Pioneer Preacher*; Andover, *Townsmen*, Jan. and Feb., 1888.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Miss Marion La Mere, March 15, 1935; letter from Mrs. Grace M. Richardson, March, 1935; *Old Anti-Slavery Days*, Danvers Historical Society, xiv-xvi, xix.



Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Bradstreet, a daughter of the Bakers, tells that when she was about seven years old a fugitive came to their house who "had run away after seeing his wife and children sold to other masters." She stood by the side of the bed in an upper chamber holding a lamp while her parents heated a layer of brown sugar in the bed with a warming-pan and then put the old negro upon it to heal his back, still raw from the whippings he had received. After a fortnight's nursing he was well enough to be sent on his way. For another fugitive, about thirty-five years old, she held the lamp while her mother fed him broth with a spoon. Another had to be nursed also before he could travel northward. As Mr. Baker feared this last man would not have money enough to pay his toll across the bridge into Canada, he went to the boundary and waited on the American side. At the appointed time the fugitive appeared and Mr. Baker paid his toll. He afterwards related that "he never saw anything alive move so fast" as did that slave in his "dash across the bridge to freedom." Some time after 1848 a Rev. Mr. Foster, who lived with the Bakers, preached an anti-slavery sermon in the "Quail Trap" so called which aroused a mob to visit their house in an effort to wreak its vengeance on the preacher.<sup>1</sup>

The fifth or shore line of the Underground system out of Boston ran through Lynn, Salem, Marblehead, Beverly, Ipswich, Newburyport, and Amesbury to Seabrook, New Hampshire, unless the branch from Amesbury to West Newbury was used. In Lynn the Male Anti-Slavery Society was organized in April, 1832, and had a rapid growth. In a few years it was supplemented by four other societies, two of which were juvenile. Nevertheless, there were enough pro-slavery men in Lynn to mob the office of the *Record* in 1835. That paper was owned by Jonathan Buffum, a Quaker and an abolitionist, who associated with him John B. Tolman. Both of these men were Underground

<sup>1</sup>*Historical Collections*, Danvers Historical Society, Vol. 4, pp. 129-30.

operators, as were also their fellow-townsmen James N. Buffum and James Silsbee. The last named is known to have afforded refuge in his house for many runaways, among them Latimer whom he took to Salem in November, 1842, with a team and conveyance.<sup>1</sup>

In 1851 the abolitionists of Lynn formed a Vigilance Committee, which communicated constantly with the Boston organization. In anticipation of visits by slave-hunters, they assigned parts and practiced measures for outwitting them but no slave-catchers ever came to the town, although numerous fugitives dwelt in Lynn and some lived there for years.<sup>2</sup>

At Salem, another strong anti-slavery town, where the Male Anti-Slavery Society numbered nearly four hundred and seventy members by 1837, there was considerable excitement during the autumn of 1834 which was occasioned by the experience of a slave family, the husband and father of which was a free man. He had been saving his earnings to buy them, but as yet could not pay the price demanded by their master. Then he learned that one of his boys was to be sold, and found a way to have all of the family escape to Boston. From there a colored preacher passed them on to Salem, where Nathan Breed took them into his home. The next day a reward of \$600 was offered for them in a Boston paper, and Mr. Breed spirited them away just in time to prevent their being caught by a slave-hunter.<sup>3</sup>

Other Underground men in Salem were William Chase, Josiah Hayward, and John A. Innis. In fact, many Quakers and other abolitionists of the town were ever ready to aid escaping slaves. This group was joined by the Rev. George Waugh from Rockport, Massachusetts, some time in the 1850's. Mr. Waugh

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<sup>1</sup>*Daily Evening Item*, Lynn, Mass., Sept. 1, Dec. 19, 1892; *Fourth Annual Report*, American Anti-Slavery Society, 127-8; *History and Traditions of Marblehead, Mass.*, 269.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Geo. W. Putnam, Feb. 14, 1894.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Mary Whittier to Elizabeth and John Greenleaf Whittier, Nov. 11, 1834, (in the Essex Institute, Salem, Mass.).



not only shared his domicile with many refugees, but also piloted some of them all the way to the New Hampshire boundary, a distance of twenty-two miles.<sup>1</sup>

On the small peninsula east of Salem lies Marblehead, which received some of its runaways from Boston and some by vessel direct from the South. Those versed in Underground management at this point were Simeon Dodge and Betsy, his wife, Samuel Goodwin, John A. Purvis, and Dr. Samuel L. Young. Dr. Young's house is known as "the Orne house" and was purchased a few years ago by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, which removed from his office its fine paneling, and then sold it. In Dr. Young's day leaders of the anti-slavery cause met in this house, and fugitive slaves were harbored there. He took these negroes in his carriage to Salem.<sup>2</sup>

From 1840 to 1860 "a very large number" of refugees were given shelter, food, and clothing in the home of the Dodges, some of them being concealed there "for days and weeks together," while pro-slavery spies watched the premises. To facilitate the escape of his charges in case of a search, Mr. Dodge made a secret trap-door for their use.

One of the slaves protected by him had been put ashore before daylight at Chelsea from a brig, hidden by a woman, and towards night entrusted to a farmer on his way home to Danvers, with a load of onions. The slave was forwarded to Marblehead, where the Methodist preacher, Mr. Bailey, took him to the house of A. C. Orne. Soon Mr. Dodge transferred the runaway to his home and a few nights later he and Benjamin G. Hathaway, with a borrowed horse and wagon, escorted him to the house of John A. Innis, a little way out of Salem. The runaway took the fifteen mile drive to Judge Howe's, at Georgetown, in Mr.

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from George W. Putnam, Nov. 5, 1893; *Boston Evening Transcript*, Jan. 9, 1897; letter from D. L. Brigham, Nov. 16, 1893.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Miss Marion La Mere, March 8, 1935, quoting from a letter of Miss Martha A. Jackson, a grandniece of Dr. Young.

Innis's carriage. For a considerable time the Dodges kept William and Ellen Craft before they were sent to Maine.<sup>1</sup>

When the New England Anti-Man Hunting League was formed in Boston under the presidency of William I. Bowditch, a branch of seven members was organized in Marblehead, with Mr. Dodge as its secretary and Dr. Samuel L. Young as its president. This branch included the local Underground agents but seems to have had no occasion to function.<sup>2</sup>

From Salem three Underground trails diverged to the northward, one through Danvers, Andover, Frye Village, South Lawrence, and across the New Hampshire line; another by way of Danvers, Georgetown, and Haverhill into the same state; and the third by way of Beverly, Ipswich, Newburyport, and Amesbury to Seabrook, New Hampshire. At Beverly Dr. Ingalls Kittredge, a graduate of Harvard in 1820, was an indefatigable manager of the Underground service. From 1836 on he lived at the corner of Cabot and Federal streets, where both his house and purse were always open to the refugees. In Ipswich there were zealous workers, and at Newburyport we know of three by name, Captain Alexander Graves, a Mr. Jackman and Richard Plumer. Mr. Plumer was prominent as a dry-goods merchant and Garrisonian abolitionist, who later in life held various public positions. He lived in a two-story frame house at No. 63 Federal Street, with a barn in the rear, and went at night in his spring wagon with his son Wendell Phillips, a lad of eight or nine years, to the south end of the bridge over Parker River for the fugitives brought there by the men from Ipswich. The fugitives were stowed among sacks of grain in the wagon and driven back through town, if the way was clear, to the

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<sup>1</sup>*Old Anti-Slavery Days, Danvers, Mass.*, 150; letters from Simeon Dodge, March, 1893; letters from Geo. W. Putnam, Nov. 5, Dec. 27, 1893; letter from Miss La Mere, Jan. 15, 1935.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Simeon Dodge, March, 1893.



house of Mr. Jackman, at the north end, who took them up to Lee, New Hampshire, a distance of twenty-seven miles. Sometimes Mr. Plumer himself drove as far as Amesbury, crossing the old chain bridge over the Merrimac, and delivered his charges to John Greenleaf Whittier or his agent. As Mr. Plumer was a son-in-law of Sewell Felch, of Kensington, New Hampshire, which was less than half the way to Lee, that village was a convenient place for him to deposit his passengers. There were occasions, however, when he drove six miles out the river road to West Newbury and delivered them to a Quaker, Robert Brown, whose farm was at Turkey Hill. Once he was so closely pursued that he drew up to Mr. Brown's cornfield and told his passengers to run for their lives. They quickly disappeared down the rows of corn and got away. Another link in this chain of stations was the house of Joshua Coffin at Newbury. It still stands and is a large two and a half story frame with an extension in the rear. When the way through Newburyport was not clear, Mr. Plumer hid the fugitives in his barn, or in the cellar of his house under hay. Robert Brown maintained Underground connections with the Quaker, Thomas Folsom, at Epping, New Hampshire, and he in turn with Moses Sawyer, at North Weare, some forty miles west of Epping, Mr. Sawyer being a relative of Mr. Brown. Mr. Sawyer kept the fugitives in his cellar.<sup>1</sup>

Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who had been pastor of the First Religious Society in Newburyport for two and a half years, tells us that the town was largely pro-slavery on account of its commercial relations with Southern ports. He resigned because many

<sup>1</sup>*History of Essex County, Mass.*, (see under Beverley); Sidney Perley, *Plumer Genealogy*, 153; *Newburyport Herald*, Jan. 24, 1881; conversation with Mrs. John T. Dunnick, granddaughter of Mr. Plumer; letter from Miss Mary Plumer to Roland H. Woodwell, March 29, 1935; letter from Mrs. Ellen R. Smith, daughter of Moses Sawyer, May 22, 1935; letter from Miss Marion La Mere, March 15, 1935; letter from Miss Marguerite Merrill, Apr. 6, 1935; typed manuscript in possession of Susan L. and Alice Brown, Amesbury, Mass., June, 1932; letter from Miss Maude Kenney, Apr. 24, 1935; letter from Robert S. Brown, Apr. 12, 1935; letter from Miss Sarah Mulliken, Dec. 16, 1935.

of his parishoners resented his advocacy of the anti-slavery cause. A number of the sea-captains of Newburyport "saw no sin in returning fugitive slaves to their owners," and some of them after sailing from a Southern port had been obliged to "put back in order to eject" one or more from their lower hold. Doubtless some of these stowaways escaped detection and completed their voyage to Newburyport.<sup>1</sup>

The animus of the town towards anti-slavery men was shown in 1842 by the imprisonment in the jail of Thomas Parnell Beach, of Milford, New Hampshire, for "opening his mouth" in Newburyport "in behalf of two and a half million of his enslaved fellow-men." Mr. Beach was still in prison in January, 1843, when Milford held a rally to protest against it, maintaining that American liberty was imprisoned in the person of Mr. Beach.<sup>2</sup>

A very unusual method of transporting a fugitive slave is illustrated in the case of one who was shipped to Newburyport in a coffin. The box containing it was taken from the train by the baggage-master and stood on end to await the coming, as he supposed, of the undertaker. But at nightfall the agents of the Underground Railroad called for the box and took it away, thus relieving the negro within from the further distress of being head downward.<sup>3</sup>

In Amesbury practically everybody was ready to help escaped slaves, including John Greenleaf Whittier, who occasionally conducted them to Haverhill, where his dear friend, David P. Harmon, received them in his house on Summer Street at the corner of Maple Avenue. It was to Mr. Harmon that Whittier wrote on October 10, 1843, sending his letter by the hand of N. Groome, a negro who was eager to get his four youngest children out of slavery. The people of Ames-

<sup>1</sup>Mary T. Higginson, *Thomas Wentworth Higginson*, 103; Minnie Atkinson, *History of the First Religious Society in Newburyport, Mass.*, 69.

<sup>2</sup>George A. Ramsdell and William P. Colburn, *History of Milford, N. H.*, 106-10.

<sup>3</sup>Letter from Teresa S. Castle, of the Newburyport Public Library.



bury had contributed for that purpose, and Whittier expressed the hope that Mr. Harmon would be able to do something to the same end.<sup>1</sup>

## III

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW OF 1850 AND THE  
BOSTON VIGILANCE COMMITTEE

## THE FUGITIVE SLAVE LAW IN MASSACHUSETTS

Just before the passage of this infamous law, Mr. Garrison boasted publicly that there was no need for fugitive slaves to leave Boston, for none would ever again be captured. Not only did Boston have its contingent of these persecuted people, but so also did Fall River, New Bedford, Worcester, and other towns of Massachusetts. Theodore Parker told his audience at the Melodeon, on October 6, 1850, that from four hundred to six hundred fugitives in Boston were exposed to the operation of the new law and that some had already fled. He asked whether he should stand by and see some of his own flock carried back to bondage and do nothing to hinder it? In such a case they would call him infidel, a hireling shepherd, a sheep in wolf's clothing. He declared that he owed no allegiance to such an iniquitous law and would help and defend the fugitive with all his humble means and act with any body of serious men in any mode not involving the use of deadly weapons to defeat the operation of the law. His hearers approved his words, some even clapping their hands.<sup>2</sup>

Great meetings were held in Boston, Hingham, Lynn, New Bedford, Springfield, Worcester, and other places to denounce the law. The meeting of October 4 in Faneuil Hall, which was advertised in the *Boston Atlas*, *Daily Advertiser*, *Chronotype*, *Courier*, *Journal*, *Post*, *Transcript*, and *Traveller*, and to which Frederick

<sup>1</sup>Whittier's letter is in the Public Library of Haverhill, Mass.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Col. T. W. Higginson, Jul. 24, 1896.

Douglass was brought as a speaker, was one of the largest ever convened therein, and listened to stirring addresses by Mr. Parker and other anti-slavery leaders. Richard H. Dana, Jr., presented the resolutions, by the adoption of which aid and relief were pledged to the endangered negroes. Those of Boston and the vicinity were advised to remain, as there was no fear that they would be taken back to the land of bondage; and the hope was expressed that those who had already fled would return to their homes and business. The class of fugitives was further told that as they were not a party to the new law, they would be justified in using the means supplied them by God and nature to protect themselves and their families.

This advice was altogether too optimistic and was saved from futility by the promise of aid and relief, the instrument of which was provided by the appointment of fifty men as a Committee of Vigilance and Safety. This committee was to adopt measures for the protection of the colored people of the city in the enjoyment of their lives and liberties. The audience agreed to stand together in determined resistance to the law, in shielding the fugitives from their pursuers and to suffer the consequences, if necessary. In case of an attempt to arrest a refugee the bells were to be rung.<sup>1</sup>

On October 5 the fugitives still in Boston, being the great majority of them, held a meeting and drafted a circular, entitled "The Fugitive Slaves' Appeal," which was sent to all the clergy of Massachusetts. It was a pathetic plea in behalf of "the trembling, proscribed and hunted from chattel slavery, now scattered through the various towns and villages of Massachusetts, and momentarily liable to be seized by the strong arm of government, and hurried back

<sup>1</sup>Miscellaneous—Theodore Parker (in the Boston Public Library) II, No. 2; Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book of the Boston Vigilance Committee; John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker*, II, 91-2; W. H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom*, 235, 246-8; C. E. Stevens, *Anthony Burns, A History* (1856), 208; *Nineteenth Annual Report*, Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Jan., 1851.



to stripes, tortures and bondage." The clergy were implored to lift up their voices "like a trumpet" against the Fugitive Slave Law and "declare the eternal law of God [as supreme] over all human enactments." "They were assured that the fugitives were attempting to lead quiet lives and glorify God in their bodies and spirits," which were His. The recent law had made it highly criminal to shelter them from the slave-hunters, or refuse to take part in their capture by order of the United States commissioner. By denouncing this iniquitous law the clergy would exalt the Christian religion, weaken the mightiest obstacle (slavery) standing in the way of human redemption, and exert a moral influence towards breaking the rod of the oppressor. At the end of this plea the Fugitive Slave Law was printed.<sup>1</sup>

The Vigilance Committee followed this appeal of the fugitives by posting three hundred bills, in November, which described the personal appearance of slave-hunters then in Boston and by distributing two thousand handbills, in December, warning fugitives and the public against them.<sup>2</sup>

The *Nineteenth Annual Report* of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (January, 1851)<sup>3</sup> declared with insight that the enactment of the new law was a most important event "in the history of the Anti-Slavery Revolution," since it would "cause the number of abolitionists to multiply faster than ever before." It further said that the time was not far distant when this imagined victory of the slave power would be seen as a sure sign of its weakness and the forerunner of its downfall.

How many refugees had already departed from Boston, we have no means of knowing. The haste with which some of them left is shown by the flight of members of the little Fugitive Slave Church in

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<sup>1</sup>Copy of the circular in the scrapbook of Mrs. L. D. Parker (Boston Public Library).

<sup>2</sup>Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book.

<sup>3</sup>P. 97.

Boston, which the Rev. Leonard A. Grimes began to build in 1849. It was halted mid-way and within three days more than forty of its members fled by various Underground routes for Canada, while the others scattered in all directions.<sup>1</sup>

But the Fugitive Slave Law more than counter-balanced this effect by causing numerous refugees to come to Boston. In March, 1851, the Vigilance Committee stated in an appeal to the public that fugitive slaves living in the border free states had abandoned their homes and occupations and fled to the more distant free states, but principally to Canada, deeming their liberty insecure through the proximity of the slave states. Very many of these had sought refuge in Boston, about a hundred having arrived during the past month. The committee added that many more had come of whom they had no knowledge, and they believed that they would continue to arrive in considerable numbers. As the newcomers were destitute of almost everything and would require assistance, the committee had appointed an agent and opened an office, where and to whom they might apply. The agent's principal business would be to find employment for them. Citizens were asked for annual subscriptions, or donations of money and clothing. In March, 1851, the organization's finance committee sent a brief circular at a cost of \$50 to the clergymen of the fifteen hundred and forty-seven religious societies named in the *Massachusetts Register* to be read in their churches, with or without comment, and take up a collection. The committee felt sure that there would be no difference of opinion about the duty to supply food, clothing, physicians and so forth to the poor and sick among the escaped slaves and free persons of color. The clergymen were assured that the Vigilance Committee did not countenance forcible resistance to the law. Donations might be addressed to the treasurer,

<sup>1</sup>Siebert, *op. cit.*, 246. For an account of the work of Mr. Grimes in Boston, see Charles Emery Stevens, *Anthony Burns, A History* (1856), pp. 207-208.



Francis Jackson, or to any member of the finance committee. About \$1,500 was received in response to this circular, sums coming from many churches in different parts of the state and one contribution of £20 from Thomas and Esther Sturge, "of Northfleet, near London, England." A good deal of clothing was also received and stored until distributed in a room over the *Liberator* office. Another circular, mailed to all the towns in Massachusetts, urged the formation of local Vigilance Committees, and a few were organized.<sup>1</sup>

#### SLAVEHUNTERS OUTWITTED IN BOSTON

Several weeks after the birth of the Boston Vigilance Committee, some of its members had their first experience in thwarting the operation of the Fugitive Slave Law by Underground methods. Late in October, 1850, the fugitive, William Craft, was greeted in Boston by one Knight, whom he had known in Macon, Georgia, and soon discovered that Hughes, the jailer of Macon, was stopping at the United States Hotel. On November 1 the *Liberator* reported the presence in the city of these "two prowling villains," as it called them, for the purpose of seizing William and Ellen Craft. Ellen, being nearly white, had disguised herself as a planter and brought William as her servant by boat and rail to Philadelphia. There their Quaker protectors had taught them to read and write, after which the Crafts had journeyed to Boston and found employment, the one as a seamstress and the other as a cabinet-maker.

After being identified by Knight, William had armed himself and placed his wife in charge of William I. Bowditch, who drove with her on a Friday night to the house of Ellis Gray Loring, in Brookline, while William hid in the house of the negro refugee and Underground operator, Lewis Hayden, at No. 66 Southac (later Phillips) Street. Lewis prepared for the

<sup>1</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript*, Mar. 31, 1926; Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book.

intrusion of the slave-hunters by placing two kegs of gunpowder in his basement, which he intended to set off in case they attempted a search. Ellen remained with the Loring until the following Monday, when her husband came and took her back to Boston; but they were told by Theodore Parker and other members of the Vigilance Committee that it was unsafe for them to remain, and they were spirited to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Simeon Dodge, at Marblehead, to be kept in concealment for some days. They were next sent to Portland, where they were sheltered by Mrs. Oliver Dennet in her home on Spring Street and, finally, to England.<sup>1</sup>

By October 23, 1850, Theodore Parker had added enough members to the Vigilance Committee to make about eighty, and this number was soon increased to more than two hundred. We have already seen that Francis Jackson was the treasurer of the committee. Its president was Deacon Timothy Gilbert and its secretary Charles List. It had four subcommittees of eight members each, namely: an executive, a legal, a special vigilance and alarm, and a finance committee. Its confidential agent and doorkeeper from its foundation early in October, 1850, to its end in January, 1861, was Captain Austin Barse. Briefly stated, the object of the Vigilance Committee was to secure the fugitive slaves and colored inhabitants of Boston and the vicinity from any invasion of their rights by persons acting under the Fugitive Slave Law. Theodore Parker was more explicit in his statement of the committee's functions, which, he said, were to give warning in case of an attempt to procure a warrant for the arrest of a fugitive and see that the fugitive heard of it; if he was taken before an officer to supply counsel and the advantage of all legal delays; and if adjudged a slave to warn the city. But he omitted to mention the far more important functions of the committee in rescuing

<sup>1</sup>*New England Magazine, N. S.*, 1889-90, p. 524; III, 458; letter from Simeon Dodge; Marion G. McDougall, *Fugitive Slaves*, 59-60; letter from S. T. Pickard, Nov. 18, 1893.



stowaways from vessels out of Southern ports in Boston harbor, providing lodging, board and occupation for several hundred refugees in the city, and paying the transportation charges by rail and steamship for those who sought greater safety in the British dominions or in England. However, Mr. Parker believed that the first business of anti-slavery men was to help the fugitives.<sup>1</sup>

While Mr. Parker was absent at Plymouth late in October, 1850, Dr. Howe called at his house to say that slave-hunters were in the city. Most of the day of October 25 the legal subcommittee of the Vigilance Committee were in session, considering what action to take because warrants were out for the arrest of the Crafts and two male fugitives said to be employed at Parker's Restaurant, in Court Square. The subcommittee made things disagreeable for Hughes and Knight by arresting them for slander and haling them before a judge, who placed them under heavy bail. On the streets they were derided as slave-hunters. In as much as excitement was mounting in Boston, the Vigilance Committee thought it best to get rid of the two Georgians. To this end Mr. Parker went to their hotel and told them that, by reason of the violent inclinations of the abolitionists, he could not guarantee their safety another night. Although they displayed some bravado, they left that afternoon for New York from Newton Corner.<sup>2</sup>

Ellen Craft spent a week in the house of Mr. Parker at this time and on November 7 he performed the marriage ceremony for the pair, although they had been already married slave fashion. At the close of the ceremony he gave William some pertinent advice and a pistol and long knife with which to defend his wife. A fortnight later Mr. Parker wrote President Franklin Pierce that, while he did not love violence, he would do all in his power to rescue any fugitive slave from any

<sup>1</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript*, Mar. 31, 1926; Capt. Austin Bearnse, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup>John Weiss, *op. cit.*, II, 93, 96, 98.

officer who attempted to return him to bondage. He would ring the bells to alarm the town and serve with any body of serious men who would go, without weapons in their hands, to accomplish the task. He declared that a thousand-dollar fine should not stand between him and the eternal law of God.<sup>1</sup>

Although the *Liberator* made it a practice to report the presence of slave-hunters in Boston, the Vigilance Committee had posters put up describing their personal appearance and handbills distributed warning the fugitives and the public against them. Such persons were often in Boston during this period and usually stopped at the Revere House, in Bowdoin Square, not far from the centre of the colored population. Their movements were closely watched by men in the pay of the committee. In a proclamation, "To all the Good People of Massachusetts," that body told of three slave-hunters, one David, another Edward Barrett, and a third of unknown name, and gave detailed descriptions of the first two.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE RESCUE OF SHADRACH FROM THE COURT HOUSE IN BOSTON

The slave-owner, John Caphart, from Norfolk, Virginia, although he had been carefully described in bills posted about the city and watched for six days by George W. Latimer, a fugitive slave paid by the committee, succeeded in having his chattel, Shadrach, arrested at Taft's Cornhill Coffee House on Saturday morning, February 15, 1851, by Deputy Marshal Riley and a former constable, Byrnes, on a warrant issued by United States Commissioner George T. Curtis. The news of the arrest was reported immediately to the Vigilance Committee and the colored people. A crowd of the latter and five members of the former hastened to the court house, where the five

<sup>1</sup>John Weiss, *op. cit.*, II, 102.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Jackson, *Treasurer's Book*.



volunteered to defend the prisoner and obtained a delay to make their preparations. Thus the case was adjourned at noon. At this juncture the colored men filled the court room, and when they took their quiet departure Shadrach was gone. This was as adroit a rescue as one will find in the annals of the Underground Railroad.

How it was done was not revealed until six years later, when John A. Andrew wrote to the Rev. James Freeman Clarke that it was "the result of an extemporaneous effort, energy and enthusiasm of one old man, a personal friend of Shadrach, who stimulated by his own stubborn zeal the few with whom he came in contact to follow him in his determination to save his friend . . . from the hands of the law at whatever personal hazard." Mr. Andrew added that the old man would never be found and that all the principal actors were, he understood, "beyond the reach of process . . ." For this rescue the Vigilance Committee paid \$100 on November 1, 1852.<sup>1</sup>

The night of the rescue, which was stormy, Shadrach was driven by Samuel S. Crocker to the house of William S. White, in Watertown, who escorted him to the residence of Mrs. Mary S. Brooks in Concord. From there he was forwarded from one station to another until at North Ashburnham he was placed on a train of the Fitchburg Railroad. Probably at Keene, New Hampshire, he boarded the Cheshire train for Canada.<sup>2</sup>

The Vigilance Committee not only paid Latimer for watching Caphart, but also paid the court costs of \$18.53 for the suit brought by Shadrach against his master through Samuel E. Sewall, Ellis Gray Loring, and John C. King.

Four members of the Vigilance Committee were

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Andrew's letter is dated March 5, 1857; see Rev. J. F. Clarke, *op. cit.*, 171; Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Charles S. Flint, Feb. 10, 1896; letter from Mrs. Brooks; *New England Magazine*. N. S., II, 280-3; *Anti-Slavery Tracts*, No. 15, N. S. (New York, 1861), 15; Capt. Austin Bearse, *op. cit.*, 17; *Atlantic Monthly*, 1897, pp. 344-5.

arrested for the rescue of Shadrach, namely, the negroes, Lewis Hayden and James Scott; a State Street lawyer, Robert Morris; and the editor of the *Chronotype*, Elizur Wright. For the defense of these men the legal subcommittee of the general committee collected \$1,800 from a score of Boston's prominent men, various persons of Lynn, Salem, and New Bedford, Ellis Gray Loring of Brookline, Ralph Waldo Emerson of Concord, the Vigilance Committee of Worcester, and \$121.57 from the treasury of the Boston Vigilance Committee. Captain Bearse did the soliciting, and as the money brought in by him at first was soon expended, as well as that received for general purposes, he was directed to continue, and did so at intervals in 1851 and 1852, canvassing in Boston, Lowell, and other places and securing \$586.80. According to Lewis Hayden, there were practically no colored men in Boston immediately after the Shadrach prosecutions, for they had scattered.<sup>1</sup> In June, 1855, and in July and August, 1859, Captain Bearse was out collecting again and gathered in \$460.

For their services in the case of the alleged rescuers of Shadrach, John P. Hale received \$400, Richard H. Dana, Jr., \$400, George F. Farley \$100, and Richard Hildredth \$100. Late in 1852 Mr. Dana presented an additional bill for \$400, which was paid in view of the fact that he had volunteered his services in the case of Anthony Burns. This amount was made up by the payment of \$20 each by twenty prominent men of Boston. John C. King received \$16 for copies of the indictments and \$40.79 for witnesses, of which he returned \$1.30. Other witness fees, etc., amounted to \$15.93. Elizur Wright was paid \$27.25 for the expenses of his trial. Other expenses totaled \$315.35. Altogether the rescue of Shadrach cost \$1,820.32, but all the defendants were acquitted by Judge Sprague, of the United States Court, in February, 1851.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book; *Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1897, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book.



THE VIGILANCE COMMITTEE'S ACTIVITIES IN  
BEHALF OF SIMS

The arrest of the fugitive, Thomas Sims, on April 3, 1851, which terminated in his rendition amidst humiliating circumstances, concerns us only in so far as it involved the Vigilance Committee. Brought from Savannah as a stowaway in the brig *M. & H. Gilmore*, Sims escaped to shore in the vessel's boat, but was caught and imprisoned in a room on the third floor of the court house, which was surrounded by heavy chains and an extra force of police before the next morning. Word of this was communicated promptly to the Vigilance Committee, who summoned by messenger those of the members living in neighboring towns. For example, the Rev. Thomas Wentworth Higginson came from Newburyport with his summoner and found the committee in session in the *Liberator* office. He tells us that its component elements were so diverse as to render practical action very difficult. Half of the members were non-resistants; the Free Soilers were indignant over Sims's arrest but unwilling to do anything that would place them "outside the pale of good citizenship," while the rest, including Mr. Higginson himself, Lewis Hayden, and the Rev. Leonard A. Grimes, pastor of the Twelfth Colored Baptist Church, on Phillips Street, wanted steps taken to rescue the prisoner. Their plan was to have Mr. Grimes, who had access to Sims, direct him to appear at an unbarred window of his room at the time appointed and leap down to the mattresses to be provided below. He would then vanish by means of a waiting "horse and chaise," for the hire of which \$10 was paid. But, alas, after all the arrangements had been made workmen were seen fitting that window with iron bars.<sup>1</sup>

Already before Sims's arrest Theodore Parker had sent out two men on "secret service," bills had been

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<sup>1</sup>*Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1897, p. 346; *New England Magazine*, June, 1890, p. 385.

posted warning the public of the presence of slave-hunters, and handbills had been distributed. A thousand placards were posted in the district occupied by the colored people.<sup>1</sup>

By vote of a mass meeting held on Boston Common shortly after Sims's apprehension under the auspices of the Vigilance Committee, every friend was urged to be in Boston to witness the last sad scene of the commonwealth's disgrace, if it should be impossible to avoid it. This meeting and others held in Tremont Temple on April 8 and 11 protested against the Fugitive Slave Law and denounced in severe terms those concerned in the arrest of Sims.<sup>2</sup>

In March the Vigilance Committee had petitions presented to the Supreme Court of Massachusetts for a writ of *habeas corpus*, and when these were denied as showing insufficient cause, others were forthcoming, in May, representing that the power wielded by the United States commissioner was judicial, contrary to Section 1 of Article 3 of the United States Constitution, which did not authorize Congress to confer any part of the judicial power on any persons other than the Supreme Court and such inferior courts as that body might establish from time to time. These petitions were also denied, and Sims went to his hearing with Samuel E. Sewall, Robert Rantoul, Jr., and Charles G. Loring as his counsel. He was adjudged to his owner, James Porter, whose agent and attorney was John B. Bacon. In accordance with the desire of Sims for the prayers of the people, the Vigilance Committee sent out "billets" to the churches asking them to pray for the disheartened fugitive. On April 12, 1851, Sims was escorted from the court house to the wharf within a hollow square formed by three hundred police, put aboard the brig *Acorn*, and carried back to Savannah.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book.

<sup>2</sup>*New England Magazine*, II, 385-8; Capt. Austin Bearse, *op. cit.*, 22-3, 28.

<sup>3</sup>*Cushing's Reports*, 285, 291, 302-10; Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book.



At half-past five that morning the Vigilance Committee met at the anti-slavery office and arranged for meetings to demand the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law, or to make it a dead letter. It also issued an appeal "To the Citizens of Massachusetts" to toll the bells in their several towns on receiving the news of the return of the fugitive to slavery. The next number of the *Liberator* contained notices of "The Knell of Liberty" having been tolled by the church bells of Newton Upper Falls and Waltham and the town bell of Plymouth.<sup>1</sup>

The part taken by the police in the rendition of Sims had been, of course, by order of the mayor and aldermen of Boston and they appear to have been authorized to arrest fugitives. Hence, on April 24 the Vigilance Committee issued a warning to the colored people of the city advising them "to avoid conversing with the watchmen and police officers," who were "empowered to act as Kidnappers and Slave Catchers" and had "already been actually employed in the kidnapping, catching and keeping of slaves." The colored people were further told that if they valued their liberty and the welfare of the fugitives among them they must shun the police "as so many *Hounds* on the track of the most unfortunate" of their race. The employment of the police in such work was contrary to the state law of 1843, "which prohibited every Massachusetts official from taking any part in the restoration of a fugitive slave."<sup>2</sup>

After the rendition of Sims the *Republic* of Augusta, Georgia, printed the following pertinent comment about recent slave cases in Boston: "We lost the two Crafts and Shadrach and recovered Sims. A faithful execution of the law, indeed! When costs have been subtracted, we should like to know how much has been gained. We shall see . . . It would have been impossible

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<sup>1</sup>Capt. Austin Bearse, *op. cit.*, 28.

<sup>2</sup>Theodore Parker's Scrapbook (Boston Public Library). *Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1897, p. 346.

for the United States Marshal to have resisted the law of the State without the assistance of the municipal authorities of Boston, and the countenance and support of a numerous, wealthy and powerful body of citizens. It was in evidence that fifteen hundred of the most wealthy and respectable citizens—merchants, bankers and others—voluntered their services to aid the Marshal.”<sup>1</sup>

Even church services were invaded by the demands of the Vigilance Committee for conference and action. In September, 1851, Theodore Parker and several of his associates, who had gone to hear a sermon by the Rev. James Freeman Clarke, were called out to attend a meeting of the committee at the *Liberator* office.

It was about this time that Mr. Parker received a letter from A. T. Foss, of Manchester, New Hampshire, concerning the arrival there on a previous Sunday morning before daylight of two negroes from Lowell, Massachusetts, with the word that kidnapers would arrive there shortly to seize Edwin Moore, who had escaped from bondage in Norfolk, Virginia, eleven years before. According to the report, Mr. Parker had a letter from a Mr. Simmons, of Virginia, stating that five men from that state were on a mission North to recover fugitives, that Mr. Parker knew that these men had been in Boston on Saturday, that they would visit Lowell, and that then in company with the United States marshal from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, they would proceed to Manchester after the refugee Moore. Mr. Foss asked about the truth of the negroes' statement and added that, although the abolitionists of Manchester had desired Moore to stay among them in order to test the strength of the Fugitive Slave Law, he had earnestly requested to be sent to Canada and they had sent him. Numerous letters of this sort were received by Mr. Parker.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Theodore Parker's Scrapbook, 30.

<sup>2</sup>John Weiss, *op. cit.*, II, 116, 123.



At the annual convention of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, January 30, 1852, Wendell Phillips told the story of Elizabeth Blakesley, a mulatto girl, who had escaped from slavery at Wilmington, North Carolina, by concealing herself in a narrow space between the vessel's side and cabin and had endured three fumigations with sulphur and tobacco without issuing from her hiding-place. On reaching Boston she was barely able to stand. Mr. Phillips offered a resolution of protest against the surrender of Sims, who had been given up, he said, in order that the merchants of State and Milk streets might make money. He added that, although John H. Pearson, the owner of the brig by which Sims had been carried South, could still walk up State Street as honored as before, twenty years hence Mr. Pearson's children would gladly forego all the wealth their father might leave them to blot out the use he had made of the *Acorn*.<sup>1</sup>

During the last week of February, 1852, Mr. Parker was deeply engrossed with the affairs of fugitive slaves, as shown by the entries in his journal. He wrote a report relating to their petitions, spoke of one James Martin as having been just "delivered out of the jaws of the merciless," and as April opened he was filled with alarms about fugitives. A man had secreted one in his cellar until night; another man had come and told him of a plan in preparation for a capture; still another had informed on somebody's evil intentions and taken precautions against them; a Mr. — had revealed his strategy to gain certain information; and the last item in this series refers to a poster of April 9, announcing a service to be held three days later at the Melodeon, 543 Washington Street, the meeting-house of Theodore Parker's society, where anti-slavery meetings frequently took place, at ten o'clock in the morning, in commemoration of the first anniversary

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<sup>1</sup>Capt. Austin Barse, *op. cit.*, 30-33.

of Sims's rendition. Six hundred of these posters were put up.<sup>1</sup>

THE WORK OF THE VIGILANCE COMMITTEE IN  
AIDING FUGITIVE SLAVES

The Boston Vigilance Committee existed from early in October, 1850, until April, 1861, or for a period of ten years and five months. During that time it aided more than three hundred fugitives and paid for the board and lodgings of very many of them. In his record book, Treasurer Jackson mentions most of these persons by name. About two-thirds of them were men, one-third or more, women, and the rest, children. These constituted the Underground traffic handled by the committee. The record book also discloses the names of the negroes who were paid to care for these runaways. In Underground parlance they were the station-keepers, and most of them lived on Southac (later Phillips) Street and the neighboring streets on the north side of Beacon Hill. The busiest of these station-keepers was Lewis Hayden, who lived at No. 66 Southac, where he accommodated runaways constantly and sometimes considerable groups of them. Mrs. Stowe called on the Haydens in 1853, when there were thirteen newly arrived slaves of all colors and sizes under their roof. Their house was also the meeting place for Dr. H. I. Bowditch, Theodore Parker, Wendell Phillips, and other members of the Vigilance Committee when arranging plans to defeat the execution of the Fugitive Slave Law.<sup>2</sup>

Colored men and women who were paid by the committee for harboring fugitives were: Cornelia Atkins, Eli Baney, David Brown, Susan Brown, Susan Burroughs, Lewis E. Caswell, Milton Crew, Mr. Dale, E. D. Eddy, Samuel Flint, Elizabeth Fullerton, Henry

<sup>1</sup>John Weiss, *op. cit.*, 104, 106, 108.

<sup>2</sup>Capt. Austin Barse, *op. cit.*, 34; *Boston Evening Transcript*, Mar. 31, 1926; *New England Magazine*, III, 458; *Boston Evening Transcript*, Sept. 1, 1897.



Garnet, Elizabeth Gilmore, Catherine Greeland, C. H. Greeland, Benjamin Giger, the Rev. Leonard A. Grimes, Dr. M. P. Hanson, Lewis Hayden, Lewis Howard, Margaret Irwin, William Manix, John Oliver, Elizabeth Peters, Peter Randolph, Henry Richardson, John Robertson, Phillip Russell, James Scott, Mrs. Scott, Adeline Skeene, Burrill Smith, the Rev. Samuel Snowden and his daughter, Isabella S. Holmes, John M. Spears, R. C. Taft, John B. Taylor, Sarah A. Taylor, Calvin Terry, Henry Tyler, Clara Vaught, James Watson, Mrs. Charles Williams, C. D. Williams, Henry Williams, Jane Woodfolk, and Maria Young. A few prominent abolitionists of Boston received money for the care of fugitives, but this was doubtless to reimburse them for payments made to colored station-keepers. The names of these abolitionists are: Austin Bearnse, Samuel May, Jr., Robert Morris, William C. Nell, Wendell Phillips, and R. F. Wallcut. Other abolitionists of the city and vicinity kept open house for runaways, rendering their service without remuneration. The Rev. Charles Lowell, father of the poet, James Russell Lowell, preached for half a century at the old West Church, on the corner of Cambridge and Lynde streets. Rising opposite the church was "Nigger Hill," on which he did "mission work among the colored people and defied the Fugitive Slave Law."<sup>1</sup>

Besides providing board and lodging for the refugees and protecting them from slave-hunters as far as possible, the Vigilance Committee rendered them many other services. One of the most important of these was the payment of transportation for those who departed from Boston for other localities. The Treasurer's Book of Francis Jackson is less specific than one could wish in designating these localities, but reveals some interesting facts. In February, 1851, four fugitives were sent down to Plymouth, in May another, late in

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book; *Boston Evening Transcript*, Sept. 1, 1897.

October still another, and in December, 1860, one more. In February, 1851, three were sent out to Southborough, in Worcester County; in March two to Hopendale in the same county; in November one to Providence, Rhode Island; in July, 1856, three to New York City; in February, 1857, one to New Haven; in September, 1859, one to Bangor, Maine; and in January, 1861, four to New Bedford. In March, 1851, four were given passage to England. During this year St. Johns, New Brunswick, was the destination of four, of one in 1857, of one in 1858, and of two in 1859. Three went to Halifax in February, 1851, and six in the following month. In March of the same year two are specified as going to Toronto. Many more certainly took refuge in that city as well as in other towns in Lower Canada, but Treasurer Jackson lists them all as bound for "Canada." During 1851 twenty are so listed, one in 1853, twenty-two in 1854, fourteen in 1855, two in 1856, eight in 1857, one in 1858, and one in 1859. Twenty-seven were sent to places not named, and in November, 1858, is noted the payment of railroad fare for one from Portland, Maine, to Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Despite all these departures of fugitives from Boston, the Vigilance Committee found it necessary to advertise, in 1860, in the *Boston Atlas* and the *Bee* "for places for fugitive slaves."<sup>2</sup>

Fugitives leaving Boston were often driven to their trains in private conveyances, or even to outlying towns, but occasionally conveyances had to be hired from some livery stable. In February, 1851, \$10 was expended for this purpose. In September, 1852, \$2.50 was paid for a horse and buggy evidently used by Theodore Parker on a mysterious errand to Newton. In June, 1854, Captain Barse was paid \$5 for a horse and carriage required in the Underground service, and in the same month and year Samuel May, Jr., was reimbursed one dollar for the hire of a hack to take

<sup>1</sup>Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*



two slave women and a child to their train for Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Even destitute fugitives in the Dominion were not forgotten. In September, 1851, Captain Bearse shipped a box of wearing apparel to Canada at a cost of \$11.25. In the following February Mr. May sent a remittance of \$30.25 for certain refugees across the border and in January, 1854, \$20.25 more. Towards the end of the same year \$10 was given to the Rev. C. H. A. Dall for an aged fugitive in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Sums ranging from one dollar to over forty were loaned by the Vigilance Committee to some of its proteges and were repaid in a few instances. For example, about September 1, 1857, Andrew Reason, a fugitive, paid back \$12.75, and nearly two years later a female refugee returned \$20. When railroad fares were paid for fugitives and they were started on their way to Canada, they were not infrequently given \$3 for "spending money."<sup>3</sup>

Several physicians were paid by the Vigilance Committee for attending sick fugitives. In July, 1853, Dr. John Barnes received \$10 for such service. Early in August, 1854, Dr. J. S. Rock was paid a like amount for his care of the ailing child of Eliza Jones. In the spring of 1857 Dr. Thomas P. Knox had Alice C. Greene as a patient and charged \$15 for his services. Another expenditure was made for an artificial leg for Johnson H. Walker, a fugitive from Maryland, who had had a foot crushed under the car wheels at the railroad station in Wilmington, Delaware. The leg cost \$100, half of which was collected during July and September, 1858, the other half being donated by Palmer & Co., the firm from which the artificial member was bought. In the autumn of 1853 the child of Julia Smith died, and the Vigilance Committee paid \$20 for its funeral.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

Clothing suitable to a Northern climate was badly needed by many fugitives arriving in Boston. In most instances this need was met from the supply of apparel sent by request of the committee by its members and patrons, or by the articles given directly to runaways by the families harboring them. In addition, however, the committee found it necessary to buy suits of clothing for about thirty men. In a few instances only shoes, shirts, or underclothing were required. There were some where provisions, fuel, and rent must be supplied, and several where furniture was provided.<sup>1</sup>

THE RESCUE OF FUGITIVE SLAVES FROM VESSELS  
IN BOSTON HARBOR

The ostensible business of Captain Bearse was to take out parties on sailing or fishing trips down Boston Harbor in his yacht *Moby Dick*, but in reality he was at the beck and call of the Vigilance Committee for the work it had for him to do. His most adventurous work for the committee was to make trips to the anchorages in the harbor for the purpose of rescuing stowaways from vessels just arrived from Southern waters. Late in April, 1851, Captain Bearse was paid \$7 for a short voyage, evidently to watch some vessel. In the following September for a like task he was given \$5. He was not the only man who engaged in rescue work, as is shown by the fact that late in October Messrs J. M. Clapp and William R. Parsons were paid \$25 for the rescue of Jerry.<sup>2</sup>

On the morning of July 15, 1853, the committee learned that a fugitive was on board the brig *Florence*, of Hallowell, Maine, lately from Wilmington, North Carolina, and anchored off Fort Independence. The captain was sent to bring him in and took along with him Henry Kemp, sometimes his partner in these

<sup>1</sup>Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book.

<sup>2</sup>Capt. Austin Bearse, *op. cit.*, 34-5; Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book.



affairs, William I. Bowditch, John W. Browne, and a few negroes from Long Wharf. They got the slave, Sandy Swain, and sailed for Dorchester Bay. During the voyage, Sandy was directed to put on Joseph Southwick's fishing suit, which was found in the locker, and the party landed at City Point House. From there Sandy was taken by Messrs. Bowditch and Browne in a borrowed carriage to Brookline and secreted. The next night he was conveyed to Framingham, whence he was forwarded to Worcester for the long journey to Canada. For his services in this rescue Captain Bearse was paid \$100, while Henry Kemp received \$21.20.<sup>1</sup>

In the autumn of 1854 the captain was sent down the harbor to fetch a fugitive slave from the schooner *Sally Ann*, of Belfast, Maine, from Wilmington, North Carolina, then lying at Fort Independence. On approaching the vessel and demanding the negro, Mr. Bearse was threatened with perdition if he came alongside. He sailed back to Long Wharf to take on a force of men. After waiting three hours without results, he adopted the ruse of nailing a dozen coats and hats to his railing and returned to the schooner. It was now early dawn, just light enough for the *Sally Ann's* captain to be impressed by the showing of fictitious men in the yacht, and he surrendered the fugitive without delay. At City Point, South Boston, the negro was conducted to Captain Bearse's house to assume a disguise. After daylight Dr. Samuel Cabot and Samuel May, Jr., came with a carriage and took him to the Boston and Worcester Railroad Station, whence he was accompanied on the train as far as Worcester by Mr. May. There he was left in the care of other Underground operators.<sup>2</sup>

Late one night in October, 1854, Dr. Samuel G. Howe and Wendell Phillips went to Captain Bearse's house and left word that a slave from Jacksonville,

<sup>1</sup>Capt. Austin Bearse, *op. cit.*, 34-5; Francis Jackson, *Treasurer's Book*.

<sup>2</sup>Capt. Austin Bearse, *op. cit.*, 36-7.

Florida, was on the brig *Cameo*, of Augusta, Maine, then supposed to be in dock. The same night the captain sent out several small parties to locate her, one of which reported early next morning at the headquarters of the Vigilance Committee, No. 21 Cornhill, that the brig lay at Boston Wharf. Search of the vessel by warrant disclosed that the slave was missing, but he was at once found on board the schooner *William* near by, which belonged to the owners of the *Cameo*. Mr. Phillips conveyed him in a carriage to the house of Ephraim Allen, a member of the Vigilance Committee, in Concord.<sup>1</sup>

Captain Bearse replaced the *Moby Dick* with another yacht, the *Wild Pigeon*, which he built with money subscribed by members of the Vigilance Committee. Among these stockholders in the new vessel was Thomas Wentworth Higginson, who says that she was nominally let for hire, but was really intended either to bring off slaves from incoming vessels or kidnap the claimants and cruise with them off the coast of Maine until they surrendered their claim. Mr. Atkinson, the father of C. P. Atkinson, shared more or less in the exploits of the *Wild Pigeon*. Early in October, 1855, Samuel May, Jr., was paid \$26 for the hire of a boat, probably Captain Bearse's, used in the rescue of the fugitive, John Allen, and for new clothing for the runaway, and nearly six months later he drew \$18.40 from the Vigilance Committee's treasury for the rescue of John D. Phillips, another fugitive, from a vessel in Boston Harbor.<sup>2</sup>

In some instances the Vigilance Committee was advised by Southern friends when and by what vessels to expect fugitive slaves. This explains how it happened that Captain Bearse could be given definite instructions as to when to sail and where to look for an expected stowaway. Those sailing from Virginia ports

<sup>1</sup>Capt. Austin Bearse, *op. cit.*, 37-8.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 34; *Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1897, p. 355; letter from C. P. Atkinson, May 2, 1896; Francis Jackson, *Treasurer's Book*.



were liable to capture by the pilot boat standing off the Capes to search Northern vessels. This was Governor Wise's method of preventing as far as possible the flight of slaves by water from the Old Dominion. Each captain was required to pay \$10 for the search of his vessel. Captain Bearse wanted to sail down to the Capes and engage the pilot boat, but could not gain the consent of the commanders of the coasting vessels. When the *Wild Pigeon* was finally sold, the money was returned to her stockholders.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE CASE OF ANTHONY BURNS

On May 24, 1854, Anthony Burns, an escaped slave of Colonel Suttle, of Alexandria, Virginia, was arrested in Boston, confined in an upper room of the court house and taken next morning before United States Commissioner Edward G. Loring, despite the fact that handbills and posters notifying the public of the presence of the slavehunters had been distributed by the Vigilance Committee. Members of the committee, including those of neighboring towns, were summoned to a meeting. On receiving the call, Mr. Higginson, then pastor of the "Free Church" in Worcester, sent messages to several of his fellow-townsmen to hurry to Boston, and himself took the train on the morning of May 26. In the city he found sixty members of the committee in session, but with "no set purpose of united action." In fact, the meeting adjourned on hearing that Colonel Suttle and his men were passing. However, thirty remained and listened to some spirited advice from Dr. S. G. Howe, after which they appointed an executive committee to plan for action. Only twenty names of men willing to act were obtained, and the adjourned session in the afternoon was worse than the morning session.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Letter from George W. Putnam, Nov. 23, 1893; *Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1897, p. 355.

<sup>2</sup>*Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1897, pp. 349-52; Charles Emery Stevens, *Anthony Burns, A History* (1856), pp. 26-208.

At six o'clock that evening Martin Stowell arrived from Worcester and suggested to Mr. Higginson the plan of rescuing Burns from the court house while the protest meeting to be held in Faneuil Hall a little later should be in progress. A picked body of men was to be advantageously disposed near the court house and square and the announcement made at the hall that a mob of colored men was attacking the court house, where the leaders would take charge and bring out the prisoner. Mr. Higginson provided a box of axes for breaking down the doors, and he and two associates each agreed to furnish five men for the attack, while Lewis Hayden would supply ten negroes.<sup>1</sup>

When the announcement was made that the court house was being assailed by the colored mob, many persons left Faneuil Hall for Court Square in "a rush of running figures." The doors of the court house were not locked until these came. Then an alarmed official ran up from the basement, entered the door by which Mr. Higginson was standing, and locked it. In a few minutes some of the anti-slavery men carried a beam to the southwest door, affording entrance to the upper stairway, and were joined by Messrs. Higginson and Stowell in battering the door open. As these men entered the building a shot was fired, and a marshal by the name of Batchelder fell dead. A trial was held for this murder, but the evidence was lacking for a conviction. Years later Mr. Higginson learned that the fatal shot was fired by Mr. Stowell. The attackers were quickly expelled and some were led away by the police, while deputy marshals guarded the stairway with their pistols. Soon the court house was surrounded by two companies of marines and two of artillery.

During the following week the Vigilance Committee distributed seven different placards, appealing to the citizens to prevent the laws of the state from being

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<sup>1</sup>*Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1897, pp. 349-52; Charles Emery Stevens, *Anthony Burns, A History* (1856), pp. 26-208.



outraged, telling of the postponement of the "mock trial" of the fugitive, announcing the employment of murderers, thieves, and blacklegs by United States Marshal Freeman to aid in surrendering Burns, and the intention of Colonel Suttle to carry off his chattel by the help of ruffians after Commissioner Loring had set him at liberty. It was also announced that Colonel Suttle had agreed to sell Burns for \$1,200 but had raised his price, that it had been established by many witnesses that Burns was not his property, that Loring would so decide but the fugitive would be seized again, given another mock trial, and forced away. A suit was brought against Suttle, but the fugitive was adjudged to him and carried off on June 2. In the demonstration against the rendition of Burns the Vigilance Committee used "alarm banners" and "alarm bells."

After an imprisonment of five months at Richmond, Virginia, Burns was sold on the auction block. The purchaser sold him again, this time for \$1,300 and expenses, which were raised by the Rev. Leonard A. Grimes and Hamilton Willis from several rich Bostonians. Early in 1855 Burns returned to Boston a free man.<sup>1</sup>

The part played by Commissioner Loring in the rendition of Burns aroused the Vigilance Committee to seek his removal from the office of judge of probate in Suffolk County. To this end it had fifteen hundred petitions printed and circulated. Wendell Phillips made the argument for the removal, which was reported and printed at the committee's cost. Finally, in 1858, Judge Loring was removed by Governor Banks.<sup>2</sup>

After the rendition of Burns Theodore Parker preached a stirring sermon on that subject, which the committee used in promoting its work. It paid Mr. Parker \$80 for five hundred copies on March 1,

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<sup>1</sup>*Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1897, pp. 349-52; John Weiss, *op. cit.*, II, 125, 130, 132, 135-6, 138; F. B. Sanborn, *Dr. S. G. Howe, the Philanthropist*, 244.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Jackson, *Treasurer's Book*.

1855, and in the following month had a thousand more printed.<sup>1</sup>

On June 17, 1854, Mr. Parker issued a circular from the Vigilance Committee to leading abolitionists in other Massachusetts towns, suggesting the formation of similar committees to aid persons in their localities claimed as fugitives. Thus they could serve the cause of humanity: (1) by helping them in their flight to Canada, or some other place beyond the kidnaper's reach; (2) by arousing the sense of justice in the people and so prepare the way for ending slavery; and (3) by furnishing pecuniary aid to alleged fugitives who were in need. Any newly formed Vigilance Committee should inform the one in Boston of the names of its officers for the purpose of correspondence as occasion required.

In the Burns case seven men were indicted by the grand jury, namely: Messrs. Parker, Higginson, and Phillips, who had addressed the meeting in Faneuil Hall, and John C. Cluer, John Morrison, Samuel T. Proudman, and Martin Stowell for forcibly obstructing the marshal in executing the warrant against Burns. These men gave bond for their appearance before the United States Circuit Court on March 1, 1855, but they never went to trial because their indictments were quashed as being imperfect. Their counsel were: Richard Henry Dana, Jr., C. M. Ellis, and the Hon. John P. Hale. Mr. Hale was paid \$350 by the Vigilance Committee for his services, but the other two, having served as volunteers, were presented by that organization with "silver plate salvers" as testimonials of appreciation, at a cost of \$200.<sup>2</sup>

#### OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THE VIGILANCE COMMITTEE

Early in the autumn of 1854 the Vigilance Committee dispatched Simon P. Hanscom, a reporter on

<sup>1</sup>Francis Jackson, *Treasurer's Book*.

<sup>2</sup>John Weiss, *op. cit.*, II, 138-40; F. B. Sanborn, *op. cit.*, 146; Francis Jackson, *Treasurer's Book*.



the *Post*, to Bath, Maine, to rescue the fugitive, John Mason, from the bark *Franklin*, but Mason escaped from the bark at Holmes Hole (now Vineyard Haven). The cost of this mission and escape was \$24.09. About the same time the committee paid for the journey of Samuel Clemons from Missouri, where he had suffered an imprisonment of two years for aiding fugitives to escape. Thomas Jackson and his family were paid their expenses while he was in prison. In April, 1856, \$10 was remitted to Charles Sharp for his legal services in behalf of Henry Curtis, a fugitive slave, confined in the jail of Norfolk County, Virginia. Early in 1859 one hundred posters were issued, probably to warn Bostonians of the presence of slave-hunters in the city. In the summer of the same year a fugitive was caught in Hyannis, on the south shore of Cape Cod, and Captain Bearse was authorized to look after the case. John A. Andrew defended the fugitive, his expenses amounting to \$37.49, which were more than met by a collection made in Boston. In the autumn of 1859 the firm of Empie and Allen, attorneys of Wilmington, North Carolina, was paid for the defense of four colored men who were in jail there for some offense against the Fugitive Slave Law. The requisite sum was collected in Boston and New Bedford.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately after the rendition of Anthony Burns the Anti-Man Hunting League was formed in Boston, and was to have had branches in all parts of Massachusetts. Its purpose was to turn the tables on slavehunters by kidnaping them. Men of this stamp appeared in Boston in April, 1857, but addressed inquiries to the wrong persons, who reported them to the negroes. The result was that their presence was announced in the colored churches.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Francis Jackson, Treasurer's Book; *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 31, 1926.

<sup>2</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript*, March 31, 1926; *Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1897, p. 18; *Anti-Slavery Tracts*, No. 15, N. S., 67; *Boston Telegraph*, Apr. 9, 1857.

In strong contrast with the Burns and Sims cases was that of a fugitive, named Johnson, who was brought into Boston Harbor from Mobile, Alabama, by the bark *Growler* in the summer of 1856. He jumped overboard, but was pursued and captured. The incident was observed from shore, and the slave was taken before Judge Metcalf, of the Massachusetts Supreme Court, on a writ of *habeas corpus*, and at once released. He was then spirited away from further "designs on his liberty."<sup>1</sup>

In June and July, 1854, the Vigilance Committee sent circulars appealing for money to all the religious societies in Massachusetts for the aid of the fugitives, as it had done in 1851. The total realized was approximately \$800, or a little more than half obtained in the earlier solicitation. Of the fifteen hundred and forty-seven societies only seventy-eight responded, giving but \$10 on the average. Scarcely any of those in the large cities and towns contributed. Members of the committee doubtless also circulated some of the petitions praying for the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law. These petitions were signed by twenty-nine hundred citizens of Massachusetts and were in the hands of the United States Senate in June, 1854.<sup>2</sup>

A letter, dated December 21, 1854, was received by Theodore Parker from the town of Pembroke, ten miles northwest of Plymouth, Massachusetts, reporting the formation there on a stormy night of a Vigilance Committee, with the writer as chairman and an executive committee composed of Job H. Beal, Otto P. Josselyn, and L. McLaughlin. Mr. Parker's principle of non-resistance by force of arms seems to have broken down when he harbored slaves. The Rev. James Freeman Clarke tells us that his friend kept a loaded pistol and a drawn sword at hand while he had

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<sup>1</sup>*Anti-Slavery Tracts, op. cit.*, 64.

<sup>2</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript*, March 31, 1926; *Congressional Globe*, 33d. Congress, 1st Session. Senate, June 28, 1854.



two fugitives hidden in the closet of his study at his house in Exeter Place.<sup>1</sup>

Certain United States marshals of Boston played into the hands of the Vigilance Committee by evading the performance of their disagreeable tasks. One of them was careful when calling at a house in search of a fugitive slave to tell the occupants that if the slave was not there he would return for him or her the following day. Former Marshal Barnes admitted that he thwarted the demands of slavehunters to find their chattels by going to the *Liberator* office and confiding to Mr. Garrison that he was seeking a certain fugitive. The next thing he knew was that the fellow was in Canada.<sup>2</sup>

The Vigilance Committee doubtless took part in circulating petitions for a more stringent Personal Liberty Law than that of 1843, and one was enacted by the legislature in 1855. The attorney general gave his opinion that some of the clauses of the new law were unconstitutional, and Governor Gardner vetoed it, but it was passed over his veto by a two-thirds vote.<sup>3</sup>

By 1858 the number of fugitives being forwarded from Boston to places of safety in Canada or elsewhere had greatly declined, although many were still living within the confines of Massachusetts, and some were arriving. In this year, the Personal Liberty Law was amended in a number of its sections, and the abolitionists petitioned the legislature to enact a law which should provide that no person who had been held as a slave should be delivered up by any officer or court, state or federal, within the commonwealth for owing labor under the laws of one of the slave states. Copies of the petition were transmitted by the Vigilance Committee to all the post offices of Massachusetts, and the *Liberator* of October 1 printed a

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<sup>1</sup>J. F. Clarke, *Anti-Slavery Days*, 87; F. B. Sanborn, *op. cit.*, 142.

<sup>2</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript*, March 31, 1926.

<sup>3</sup>Marion G. McDougall, *Fugitive Slaves*, 68-9.

notice that copies might still be obtained from Samuel May, at No. 21 Cornhill, Boston.<sup>1</sup>

In this same year the Boston abolitionists urged upon Congress the necessity of ridding American soil of slavery on the score that failure to pass laws to that end would result in the loss of many lives in the struggle to make the United States a free nation.

The volume of Underground traffic handled by the Vigilance Committee of Boston varied greatly from year to year. The largest number was sixty-nine, in 1851, when the Fugitive Slave Law produced its most acute effect in driving the more timorous refugees from the city. The smallest number sent off in any one year was nine, in 1858. But it must not be supposed that these figures represent the total out-bound traffic from Boston in those years, or would this be true of the figures for any of the other years during which the Vigilance Committee operated. There were certainly many fugitives harbored and sent on their way by Boston abolitionists and negroes who never came within the committee's knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

From various items of expense borne by the committee, as noted in the foregoing pages, it is clear that that organization pursued a liberal policy in providing for the refugees who came under its care; in employing Captain Barse and his yacht to rescue stowaways from vessels in Boston Harbor; in issuing numerous warnings of the presence of slave-hunters; in hiring halls and holding public meetings to denounce the Fugitive Slave Law and arouse public sentiment in behalf of its victims; in defending captured slaves and the persons who were charged with aiding them; in paying for the rescues of Shadrach and Jerry and planning other rescues; in circulating petitions for the removal of Judge Loring, for the greater safety of fugitives living in Massachusetts,

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<sup>1</sup>Marion G. McDougall, *op. cit.*, 68-9.

<sup>2</sup>*Boston Evening Transcript*, March 31, 1926; Francis Jackson, *Treasurer's Book*.



and for the suppression of slavery by Congress; and in extending financial aid to persons incarcerated under the Fugitive Slave Law in Virginia, North Carolina, and Missouri. Such were the activities of the Vigilance Committee of Boston during the decade and more of its existence, and the money to carry them on was obtained by appeals through circulars to the religious societies of Massachusetts, but more particularly by the solicitation of individuals in Boston and outlying towns and cities. In these ways the committee collected from October 21, 1850, to January 1, 1861, \$6,589.40. To this amount should be added the sum of \$1,667.22 collected by its legal subcommittee from May 16, 1851, to November 6, 1852, making a total of \$8,256.62.

The record of its activities, its receipts, and its expenditures are to be found in the Treasurer's Book kept by Francis Jackson, which is in possession of the Bostonian Society in the Old State House, in Boston. That book is unique as a contemporaneous document revealing the workings of the Underground Railroad in and from a particular centre. If it had been produced before a grand jury its incriminating evidence might have led to the indictment, trial, and punishment of numerous residents of Boston and neighboring towns for their conspiracy to defeat the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law in their respective localities. That the Vigilance Committee was for the most part successful in its efforts is obvious.

#### IV

#### THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS

##### THE COUNTIES WITHIN WHICH IT WAS CONFINED

Western Massachusetts also had its Underground Railroad system, one much more limited in extent than that of the eastern part of the state, with which it had

no interconnections. The western system was comprehended within the counties of Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin, with branches extending into the northern part of Berkshire. The southern feeders of this system were routes extending northeastward from Greenwich and New Haven up to Hartford, Connecticut, and its vicinity, and so north to Springfield, Massachusetts. Traffic on the Connecticut River as far as Hartford was probably responsible for the larger number of the fugitives passing through the state of Connecticut. From Hartford these took the overland route into Massachusetts.<sup>1</sup>

#### SPRINGFIELD AS AN UNDERGROUND CENTRE

In Springfield, which was the principal Underground centre in western Massachusetts, the most active operators were: the Rev. Dr. Samuel Osgood, Dr. Jefferson Church, Joseph C. Buell, Jonas Coolidge, Rufus Elmer, John Holland, Jeremy Werringer and his wife Phoebe, John M. Woods, and, for a brief period, Captain John Brown. Of these abolitionists Messrs. Buell, Church, Holland, and Osgood are known to have kept runaways in their homes. Mrs. L. W. Vaille, a next-door neighbor of Dr. Osgood and a member of his church, often employed those harbored by him to work about her premises. In several instances she wrote to their masters for the terms under which they would manumit their fugitives, but the threatening replies she received only hastened the departure of those concerned. That Dr. Osgood was widely known in Springfield as a friend to colored people is shown by the fact that the manager of the Hampden House directed to him a negro and his little girl who drove up one dark night and applied for accommodations.<sup>2</sup>

The United States Hotel, owned and operated by

<sup>1</sup>W. H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut* (a volume of letters and other materials).

<sup>2</sup>Letter from M. M. Fisher, March 23, 1893; letter from Erastus F. Gunn, Nov. 23, 1896; letter from Wm. Rice, Feb. 28, 1896; letter from Mrs. Vaille, Feb. 18, 1907; *Springfield Weekly Republican*, Jan. 31, 1907.



Jeremy and Phoebe Werringer and familiarly and widely known as "Uncle Jerry Werringer's Tavern," was probably the principal Underground headquarters in Springfield, although it was patronized by many distinguished guests, being famous for its hospitality and excellent table. Mrs. Jerome Bonaparte and members of her family from Baltimore stopped there on one occasion when her head waiter, William Gordon, was in hiding with the Werringers, but "Uncle Jerry" got him away in safety. The presence of negro servants at the tavern was favorable to the secreting of fugitives about the place. One of these servants was Mrs. Julia Lee, who had a favorite hiding-place for some of them under the kitchen stairs. Others were stowed away in a long bin in the granary. Mrs. Sarah B. Merrick, a niece and adopted daughter of the Werringers, was in the habit of going as a girl with "Aunt Lydia" under pretext of feeding the calves and pigs, but really to slip food and coffee into the granary bin. She asserts that Mr. Werringer "packed many a slave off as merchandise." He appears to have been engaged in the Underground service from the late 1830's onward.

By the early 1840's bands of fugitives were continually traveling up the Connecticut Valley from one Underground station to another at night and arriving in Springfield by the wagon load. There they were taken to the Worthington grove and distributed among the abolitionists. Even elderly fugitives arrived. Early in July, 1844, "a venerable husband and wife, sixty years of age," reached Springfield on their way to the land of freedom. By 1847 the local method of handling the travelers came to be considered too dangerous, and Dr. Osgood, Rufus Elmer, a Mr. Calhoun and a negro preacher took a house in the woods at Brightwood, on the north side of the city, for the use of the fugitives. It does not follow that all of them were taken there, for some were still accommodated by the station-keepers in town.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Letter from Mrs. Merrick, Feb. 28, 1896; *Springfield Homestead*, Feb. 6, 1907; *Springfield Weekly Republican*, Jan. 31, 1907.

In 1851 Captain John Brown came to Springfield and lived there for some months in a house, the parlor of which he did not furnish in order to have more money for aiding fugitive slaves. The church he attended was anti-slavery in its principles. Realizing the increased danger to Underground travelers now that the new Fugitive Slave Law was in force, he formed a group of colored men, including B. C. Dowling and J. W. Howard, the sexton of the South Church, which he called the "Springfield Gileadites." These men were to keep their own counsel, arm themselves, and be always ready to defend and rescue any fugitive who might fall into the hands of slavehunters. In case they found a traitor among their own number they were to take vengeance on him.<sup>1</sup> One discovers no instances in which these "Gileadites" found it necessary to act.

United States Commissioner Chapman, in Springfield, was also an officer of the Emigrant Aid Society. The abolitionists tried to induce him to resign his commissionership so as to avoid the possible necessity of issuing warrants for apprehending runaways and deciding cases. But he refused, explaining that as an Emigrant Aid officer he would forward the runaways to other parts and then as commissioner issue the warrants.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE UNDERGROUND ROUTE BY WAY OF WESTFIELD RIVER

Some of the fugitive slaves who reached Springfield were sent or conveyed northwestward up the Westfield River nine miles to the town of Westfield, where they stopped at one or another of several houses. One of these was on Main Street, another on Franklin, and the third on School. The names of the families then

<sup>1</sup>*History of Springfield, Mass.*, 1636-1886, pp. 470-1; O. G. Villard, *John Brown, A Biography Fifty Years After*, 50-3, 55, 75; *Liberator*, July 14, 1844.

<sup>2</sup>*History of Springfield, op. cit.*, 470-1.



occupying these houses have not been preserved. A trip of a dozen miles farther up the river brought the wayfarers to the town of Huntington, where Asa Merritt was a station keeper. There may have been others. The next stop of the travelers by the Underground was at Cummington, which was a junction of four branches of that road, one from Huntington, and one from Northampton and two out-bound, one to Peru, eight miles west, and the other to Windsor, ten miles somewhat northwestward. These two villages are in the Hoosac Range and may have been terminals in that part of Berkshire County.

A few miles east of Cummington is Goshen. Here lived George Abell, who married Tryphena Cathcart in 1828. She belonged to a family of abolitionists and never turned a friendless person from her door empty-handed. Hence the fact that colored men, women, and children were frequent visitors at the Abell home awakened no undue curiosity in the minds of their own and their neighbors' children. The strangers apparently came from Southampton on the route north from Westfield. Mr. Abell was a staunch anti-slavery man and one of the few members of the Liberty party in his district. In 1861 he removed to Conway, in Franklin County.<sup>1</sup>

The next Underground centre north of Goshen was Ashfield, where Hosea Blake received the fugitives and passed them on to Hart Leavitt, in East Charlemont. Mr. Leavitt, like his father Roger Leavitt, was a sturdy abolitionist, and did all he could to help slaves gain their freedom.<sup>2</sup>

#### NORTHERN ROUTES FROM WEST SPRINGFIELD AND WESTFIELD

From West Springfield the direct route lay up the west side of the Connecticut River to Northampton

<sup>1</sup>Letter from L. S. Abell, Dec. 9, 1895; letter from J. Johnson, Dec. 3, 1895; letter from Mrs. Nan Hillman, Dec. 30, 1895; letter from Charles Parsons, Dec. 3, 1895.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from Charles Parsons, *supra*.

(now including Florence), Whately, Deerfield, and Greenfield. The traffic at Northampton was increased by the passengers arriving from Westfield and Southampton, this route lying west of the southern part of the Holyoke Range. At Southampton one of the benefactors of the fugitives is believed to have been the Hon. Samuel C. Pomeroy. On occasion the wayfarers were conveyed sixteen miles west of north to Goshen, but usually were sent to Northampton, which is only half the distance. As Florence is an outward of Northampton we may consider them together. They could boast of a very devoted little group of Underground workers, the most important of which was J. Payson Williston. Mr. Williston was very secretive about his activities, but strange negroes were often seen about his premises. He had the reputation of knowing more about the Underground service and contributing more money in its support than any other man of his section. Samuel L. Hill, who settled in Northampton about 1840, also kept a well-patronized station. His son, Arthur G. Hill, testifies that he saw many an escaped slave welcomed at his father's home, where they sometimes stopped only long enough to be fed and change conductors. Occasionally young Hill was permitted to drive the fugitives to the next station, but usually the trip was made by his father and was to Cummington, a distance of fourteen miles to the northwest, where a Mr. Kingman received the passengers. Miss Melissa E. Dawes remembers that her family also kept open house for fugitive slaves in Cummington. At rare intervals Mr. Hill delivered them to a Mr. Craft, at Whately, which was seven miles to the north. Another station in Northampton was managed by David Ruggles, a colored man, who had previously been the editor of the *Mirror*, a newspaper in New York City. On one occasion Mr. Ruggles and a white man named Seth Hunt induced Sheriff Ansel Wright to take a slaveholder and a slave girl, whom he had brought to Northampton, before Judge



Charles A. Dewey. The judge informed the girl that she might leave her master if she wished, but she was afraid to do so. Other Underground operators at Northampton were A. P. Critchlow, a Mr. Hammond, Moses Brest, and Austin Ross.<sup>1</sup>

The prevailing anti-slavery sentiment in Florence was favorable to the temporary sojourn of fugitives, and a considerable number of them remained for weeks or months. However, after the rendition of Anthony Burns in Boston those still there became alarmed and resumed their journey to Canada. Austin Ross harbored a man by the name of William Wilson for eighteen months, while he was employed as a night watchman at the Greenville cotton mill. Having thus accumulated some money, Wilson went back South to fetch his adult son from slavery. On their return the two lived in a small tenement until they had saved enough to make the trip for the abduction of Wilson's daughter. After a long absence the son came back alone, his father having been captured, but he felt confident that he would escape. That not only proved to be true but he also rescued his daughter and brought her to Florence. Again they found employment and saved their money until they were ready to move on to Canada.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Critchlow often employed fugitive slaves in his daguerreotype case factory. One of these whose name was French, being in danger of seizure by his master or the master's half-brother, who had come to Florence for the water cure, was guarded at the factory during night hours by Mr. Critchlow until the danger was past.<sup>3</sup>

Josiah Henson, the noted refugee, made one of his trips to Canada by way of Florence after he had been

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph Marsh, *History of Florence, Mass., 1681-1894*, p. 165; letter from Henry Shepherd, Oct. 2, 1896; letter from A. Lyman Williston, Oct. 10, 1896; letter from F. Bonners, Sept. 18, 1896; letter from Miss Dawes, Aug. 5, 1896; letter from D. W. Bond, Jul. 12, 1896.

<sup>2</sup>See references above.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Marsh, *op. cit.*, 165.

in the South to abduct some slaves. Calvin Fairbank, the white abductor who rescued forty-seven slaves from their masters and suffered a long imprisonment for one of his exploits, was for several years a resident of Florence.<sup>1</sup>

At Whately, on the direct route, the friends of the fugitives were: Deacon John M. Bardwell, Deacon Dexter Morton, Daniel F. Morton, Osee Monson, and Thomas Nash. Of these Mr. Monson has been called the principal one, but he removed from the town about 1850. Living in an isolated part of Whately and owning an excellent team of horses, he could easily make the trip of ten miles up the valley to Deerfield, or of sixteen miles northwestward to East Charlemont. Apparently the younger men of Whately remained in ignorance of Mr. Monson's Underground journeys, but they happened to learn of one he made to East Charlemont with a negro he had harbored and whispered about it a good deal.<sup>2</sup>

In Deerfield the anti-slavery movement obtained an early foothold, and some of its supporters became Underground agents. Among these the most outspoken was Dr. Samuel Willard, who declared his purpose to perform for fugitive slaves "all the acts of kindness" he would "if there were no prohibition against it." He would "quietly endure the consequences though enormous fines or exactions" should deprive him of his last cent, and though he should be "thrown into prison for six months, or six years, or all the residue" of his life; and he would not put the Government to "the expense of a single lock and key" for his safe keeping. Even should the doors be open both day and night he would "not come out until the magistrates" came themselves and took him out.<sup>3</sup>

The contest of John Quincy Adams in Congress for the right of petition against slavery made a strong

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Marsh, *op. cit.*, 165.

<sup>2</sup>Letter from J. M. Craft, Jul. 24, 1896.

<sup>3</sup>George Sheldon, *History of Deerfield, Mass.*, II, 373.



appeal to the people of Deerfield. On April 2, 1838, they held a town meeting which adopted a series of resolutions on the subject. These declared that the tabling of all petitions relating to slavery without printing, debating, or referring to committee was a violation of the Constitution and an insult to the sovereignty of the people, and dangerous to the union of the states; that the constitutional guarantee to the citizens of each state of all the privileges and immunities of the several states was a falsehood and a mockery as long as the citizens of those states which did not tolerate slavery were not permitted to reside and travel in other states without being subjected to insult, outrage, stripes, imprisonment, and even death; that Congress should exercise its constitutional right to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and in the territories; and that a committee of five designated men should prepare a memorial based upon the above propositions, which, together with the resolutions, should be certified by the town clerk and sent to Mr. Adams, with the request to present them to the House of Representatives.<sup>1</sup>

Greenfield lies only a few miles north of Deerfield and maintained Underground connections with it. In the Greenfield of those days the first dwelling east of the Green River bridge was a large, square house, with a chimney in the centre, owned and occupied by Samuel Wells, of a well-known family. The local tradition is that this house was a way-station of the Underground Railroad. In fact, the Wells family "were at one time involved in some trouble for harboring slaves." From the Wells farm, which is now a part of Greenfield, they were forwarded nineteen miles up to Brattleboro, Vermont. Another resident of the town who was deep in the mysteries of the Underground was Dr. Charles L. Fisk, Sr., a prominent pioneer there in the anti-slavery cause. There must

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<sup>1</sup>George Sheldon, *op. cit.*, II, 821-2.

have been others engaged in the secret work, for as early as November, 1836, the Anti-Slavery Society of Greenfield numbered ninety-two members. It is said in the town that fugitives were traced from there to East Charlemont, which lies ten miles to the west.<sup>1</sup> These also were probably sent on to Brattleboro.

THE ROUTE FROM SPRINGFIELD UP THE EAST  
SIDE OF THE CONNECTICUT

As Springfield is situated on the east bank of the Connecticut River, it is not surprising that there should have been Underground traffic on that side also. Evidently the fugitives followed the course of the river beyond the Holyoke Range before turning north-east to Amherst. Already in February, 1836, the North Parish of Amherst had its Anti-Slavery Society, some of whom doubtless aided the runaways, although their names are not known.<sup>2</sup>

Eleven miles north is Montague, which had at least three uncompromising abolitionists—Kendall Abbott, Joshua Marsh, and the Rev. Erastus Andrews, who was the father of Dr. E. Benjamin Andrews, one-time president of Brown University. The longest pastorate of the elder Mr. Andrews was at the church of Montague and Sunderland, which stood in North Sunderland. In aiding fugitives he found it unnecessary to practice secrecy.<sup>3</sup> It would seem likely that he sent them across the river to Greenfield.

The number and ramifications of the Underground routes of western Massachusetts clearly indicate that the Connecticut valley was an important thoroughfare for escaped slaves, and that hundreds of them

<sup>1</sup>Francis M. Thompson, *History of Greenfield, Mass.*, II, p. 1181; letter from Dr. Charles L. Fisk, Jr., Aug. 17, 1896; letter from Mrs. Geneva C. Jones, Dec. 4, 1934; *Fourth Annual Report*, American Anti-Slavery Society, 128; letters from Mrs. Isadore C. Taylor, Mar. 11 and Apr. 30, 1935.

<sup>2</sup>*Fourth Annual Report*, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup>Letter from E. Benjamin Andrews, Apr., 1895.



passed that way. Their travel seems to have been by team or on foot, and no instance is given in the local histories or in the letters of correspondents of their being transported by steam railroad. In this respect the practice of the operators of western Massachusetts differed from that of those in the eastern part of the state. The only instance of anything like a vigilance committee in the Connecticut valley was John Brown's colored "Gileadites" at Springfield, who seem to have had no occasion to manifest their ability to outwit slavehunters. In fact, so far as shown by the records, western Massachusetts had no renditions.

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