1999

Misc. Research on Underground Railroad

Lillion Batchelor

CONCEPT PAPER
BUFFALO QUARTERS HISTORIC INSTITUTE

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD REENACTMENT PROGRAM

The Underground Railroad is an important element of American and African American history. To recognize that African and European Americans worked together prior to the abolitionist movement to assist persons who were legally enslaved in a so-called "land of freedom" is a part of our history that needs to be recited, rehearsed and shouted from the housetop in these times of increased bigotry and insensitivity.

It is reported that between 1830 and 1850, an estimated 30,000 slaves of African descent made their way from the Deep South of the United States to Canada. These African slaves came from as far as Georgia and walked to Western New York and on to Canada. Many of the slaves passed through the Niagara Frontier (Erie and Niagara counties) and crossed by boat and/or bridge to freedom on the shores of Canada. We don't know how they accomplished such a task in the face of such formidable odds -- but we do know what motivated them -- a human drive for freedom and we do know that it was the sense of decency and humanity that encouraged many people to aid and abet these alleged political felons. These people, the travelers on the Underground Railroad and those who opened their homes to the travelers are our inspiration and our legacy.

The Niagara Frontier and especially Buffalo, New York has a rich heritage as it relates to the Underground Railroad. Unfortunately, not many Buffalonians know about it and certainly not many Americans. Under the inspired and committed direction of **Ms. Lillion Batchelor**, the **Buffalo Quarters Hitorical Institute** was formed to preserve the rich legacy of the Underground Railroad as it relates to the role of Buffalo, New York -- "The City of Good Neighbors". Our purposes are to:

1. Increase the awareness of Americans and Canadians to the City of Buffalo's role and importance in the Underground Railroad;

2. Expand the research and knowledge-base of Underground Railroad by exposing pertinent facts relative to the activities of and historic locations of the Underground Railroad in the Buffalo area;

3. Promote positive race relations through sharing a rich history in drama, music and literature of European and African Americans working together for a common good in the face of legalized injustices;

4. Promote better understanding and goodwill among all people by implementing yearly programs and events in appreciation of cultural diversity.

5. To honor and support persons in Buffalo who are living and serving the community in a way that is congruent with the legacy of Americans who were a part of the heritage of the Underground Railroad.

The initial goal of the **Buffalo Quarters Historic Institute - Underground Railroad Reenactment Program** is to coordinate and implement and a "Reenactment" of the activities of the Underground Railroad in Buffalo which would include:

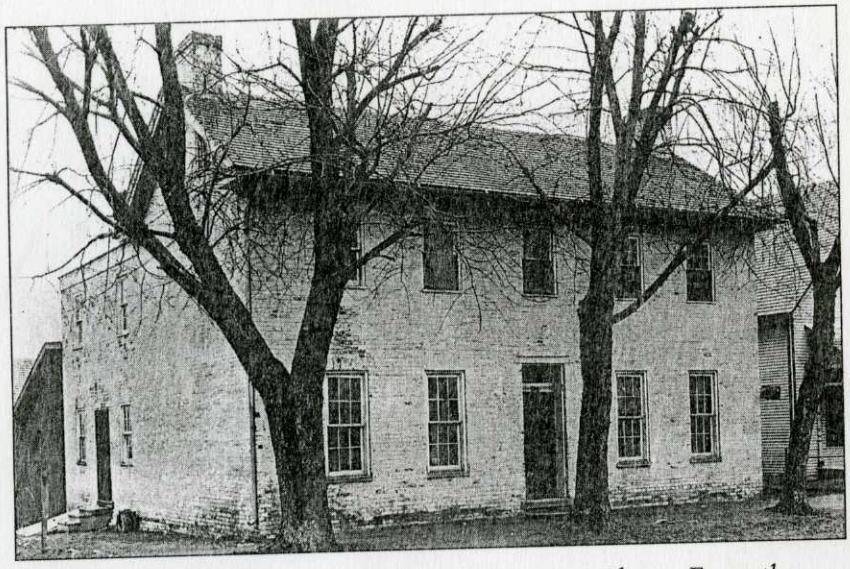
- actual mini-dramas in various places throughout the city and especially in historic spots that depict activities of persons involved in the Underground Railroad;

- a crossing on a boat from the foot of Ferry to the shores of Canada -- to commemorate and celebrate those Africans who successfully crossed to a place of freedom;

- a book fair and signing which show cases African American authors;

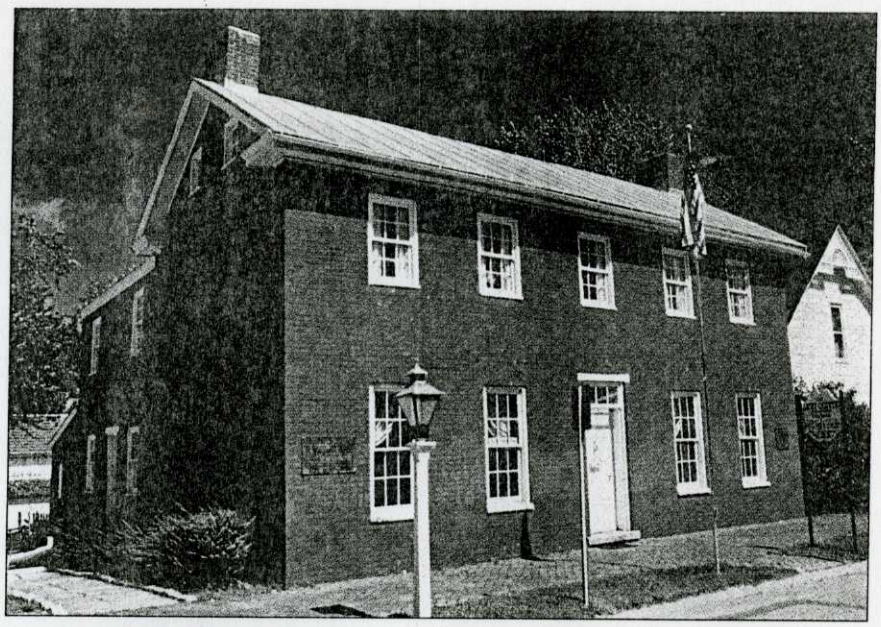
- a awards dinner to honor Buffalonians who serve the community congruent to the legacy of participants in the Underground Railroad.

houses were called station-masters, guides were called conductors, and fugitive slaves were called passengers. In the years that followed her escape to freedom, Harriet Tubman became a fearless conductor on the Railroad.



Blacks and whites worked together on the Underground Railroad. Because its members were breaking the law, the Railroad was loosely organized and had no single leader. Members of the Underground Railroad barely knew each other, but each of them shared a common goal—to abolish slavery in the United States.

Above: From the outside, houses that were stations on the Underground Railroad looked the same as any other house. Below: Railroad terms, borrowed from the country's newest form of transportation, were used to describe the Underground Railroad.



The Levi Coffin house, one of the best-known stations on the Underground Railroad

Levi Coffin was perhaps the most famous stationmaster of the Underground Railroad. A white Quaker, he grew up in North Carolina. As a boy, he and his father witnessed a group of slaves forced to march over a road while chained to each other. The slaves were being taken to a market to be sold. Levi Coffin's father asked one of the slaves why they were chained. The slave replied, "They have taken us away from our wives and children and they chain us [in case] we should make our escape and go back to [our families]." Levi Coffin never forgot that awful sight. When he was only fourteen years old, he helped a slave escape from his master. As a grown man, Levi and his wife, Catherine, moved to southern Indiana, where they opened a country store. Over the course of many years, their house was a haven for hundreds of fugitive slaves.

Levi Coffin

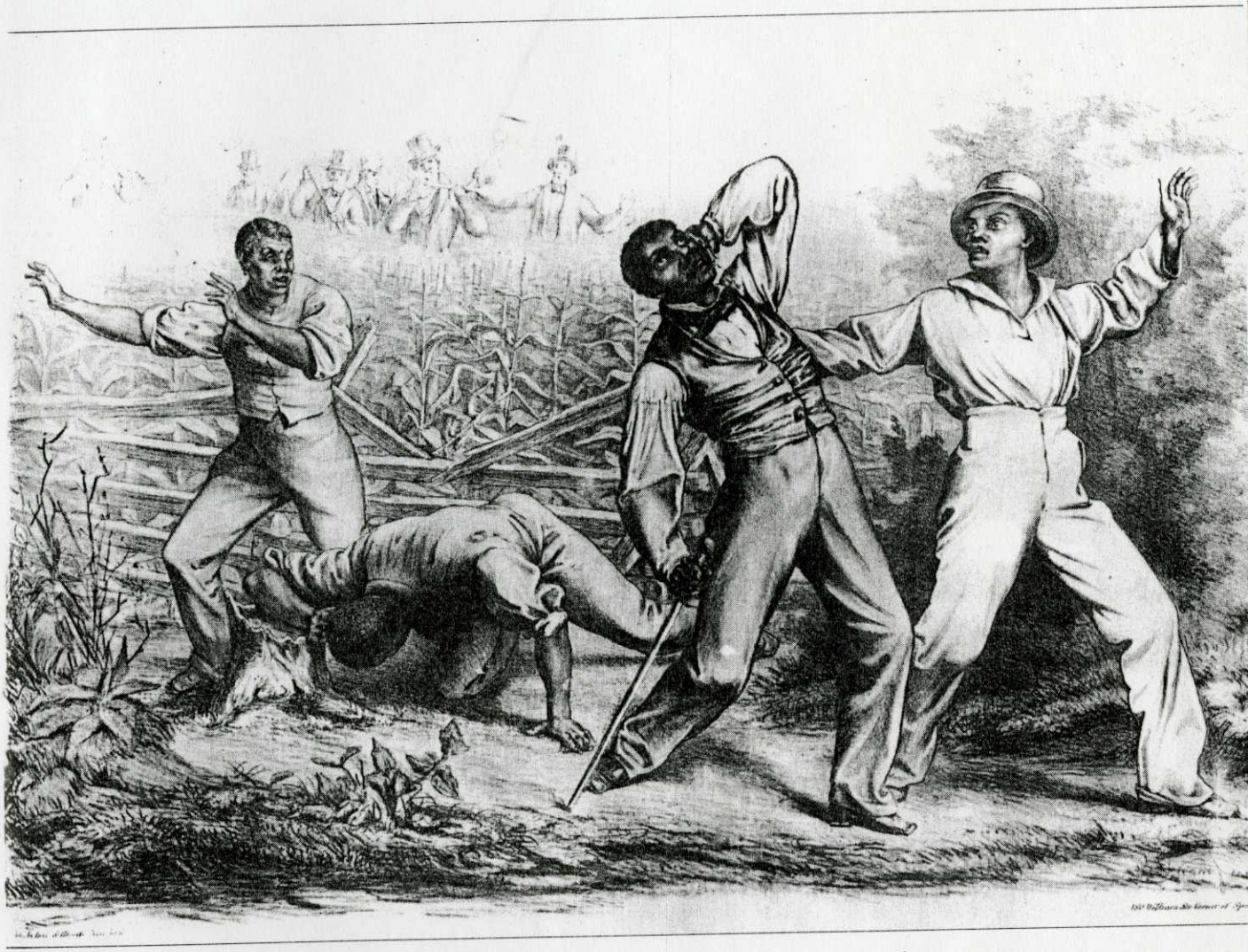
sometimes sleeping for an hour or more. The escaped slaves under her protection could do little more than wait for her to wake up and continue the journey. Despite her disability, she constantly baffled southern slave owners, who offered a $40,000 reward for her capture. But the slaves considered Harriet to be like Moses of the Bible, who led the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. Today, Harriet Tubman is known as the "Moses of her people."

Harriet Tubman (far left) with slaves she helped to escape from the South

When her days of traveling drew to a close Harriet Tubman purchased this house in Auburn, New York.

St. Catharines was cold in June 1857, and Harriet realized her parents would not be comfortable there. So she bought a small house for them in Auburn, New York, southwest of Syracuse. It was not as safe as Canada, but it was warmer. The Reverend J. W. Loguen in Syracuse could look in on them from time to time when she was gone.

That fall she returned to Maryland. Over the next several weeks, sixty Dorchester County slaves arrived at the headquarters of the Vigilance Committee. Tubman had not led all of them to Philadelphia, but she had given them directions as to how to get there on their own. She spent the winter in St. Catharines, doing odd jobs and trying to earn enough money to pay the mortgage on her parents' home in Auburn.



After the second Fugitive Slave Act was passed in 1850, it became common for slave hunters to snatch blacks who had escaped to the northern states and drag them back to slavery south of the Mason-Dixon line. Abolitionists tried to protect the runaways, but if they were caught they faced severe punishment.

mendous struggle that Grant sent his famous message, "I propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all summer."

On the morning of the 12th of August, 1864, the 49th advanced to the support of a brigade at the "Angle." With the 77th New York, they rushed into the inferno. A terrible struggle ensued in the narrow limits. So close were the combatants that muskets were discharged in each others faces and men no longer able to reload, fought with clubbed muskets. It was here Major William Ellis of the 49th was mortally wounded. This is the moment of the action, as Bidwell was urging on his gallant troops that inspired the sculptor Edmond Amateis in the designing of the Bidwell tablet that is reproduced in this issue of Museum Notes.

At the engagement at Fort Stevens under the eyes of the immortal Lincoln, Bidwell's conduct merited commendation and the commission of Brigadier General was his reward. Then came the final chapter in his noble life—Cedar Creek, the engagement immortalized by Sheridan's famous ride.

The dashing Confederate cavalry leader, General Early had crushed and hurled back the Union troops, with the exception of the Second Division of which Bidwell's Brigade was a unit.

Standing at bay on the Middletown Pike, these hardy veterans halted the rush of the gray lines. Eager to take advantage of the opportunity General Bidwell ordered a countercharge and the Confederates were driven back. The success, however, was only temporary for Early's forces, who earlier in the engagement had captured twenty-one guns, turned the artillery fire upon the Third Brigade and drove them back. At this time, General Bidwell was struck down by a cannon ball, thus ending a life of great value to our community and the Union.

The service saber, sash and belt that were worn by General Daniel Bidwell at Cedar Creek as well as the epaulets and sword that were presented to him by his comrades of Company "D" are on exhibition in the "Hall of the Wars" in our Museum.

The Underground Railway

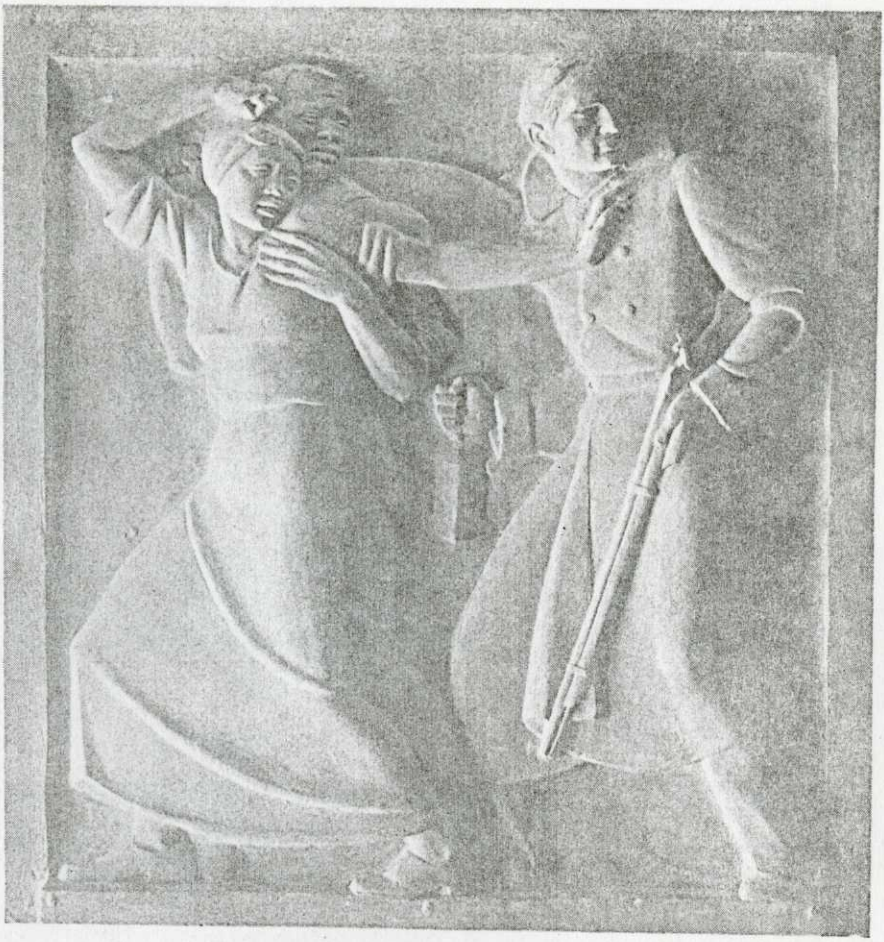
"The Underground Railway" was the name applied to an organized system instituted by the Abolitionists, whereby fugitive slaves were smuggled from one point to another on their journey north to Canada and freedom.

Buffalo was one of the important terminals of this famous system and many negroes, fleeing from the terrors of the slave block and the whip, crossed the Niagara River on the old Black Rock Ferry to the land of promise.

Soon after Buffalo was incorporated as a city the "Underground Stations" began operation in the community and continued in active service until the Emancipation Proclamation removed their cause for existence. One of these stations was on Ferry near Niagara Street and another on the corner of Utica Street and Linwood Avenue; only humble homes to the casual observer but a sanctuary to the weary and hunted slave.

The efficiency of this highly organized system can be realized only by considering the vast number of negroes who up to the date of the Emancipation Proclamation crossed from points on Lake Erie, the Detroit and the Niagara rivers. This is estimated as nearly fifty thousand souls.

Mr. Amateis in his artistic tablet which now adorns the north wall of the Buffalo Historical Society Building and is reproduced in this month's issue of



THE UNDERGROUND RAILWAY
Historical Tablet on North Side of Buffalo Historical Building
—EDMOND AMATEIS, *Sculptor*

MUSEUM NOTES, has recreated an episode in the life of this famous system. An escaping negro family is being guided by an ardent member of the organization, under the cover of darkness, from the station to the old Black Rock Ferry, that will take them to the land where the black man is not a slave and his family will not be torn asunder and sold under the hammer of the auctioneer. R. W. B.

Lectures

The Buffalo Historical Society wishes to announce the following additions to its lecture course for the season of 1930-1931.

March 17th—Frank Speaight, "An Evening of Dickens' Humor."

April 8th—Miss Clarine Bonnar, "The Lure of Australia and New Zealand."

were involved; some like Gideon Barker, an agent of the road, located more remotely than the Bakers from the point of convergence; others at the point itself in Buffalo. Here they contrived special hideouts, sometimes in places deceptively conspicuous like the Morris Butler house at the corner of Utica and Linwood; sometimes it may be in premises rather more suspect like the Negro Baptist Church in Michigan Street; or again near the ferry, on Niagara. At the American Hotel a Negro employee named Murray often helped the fugitives; on the vessels in port, another named Brown. A venturesome German, Carl Zimmer, gave indispensable aid through his ingenuity in the art of make-up and disguise. In the business a Yankee schoolmaster, John Spencer Fosdick by name, was also implicated. Still others were Douglas Williams, George W. Johnson and the tough-minded attorney, Thomas C. Love. These men, like Gideon Barker of Wales, had already made something of a reputation as figures in the local Abolitionist movement.

None of them was rich, except perhaps Love; and even he, no doubt, could have said with Dr. Pettit that had he been prosecuted for his illegal activities, he would have been bankrupt many times over.[184] But bankruptcy, prison itself or worse have always been things set at naught by those possessed of either religious zeal or patriotic fervor. The Abolitionists were possessed of both. This their enemies found it hard to believe. They saw them only as religious fanatics, not as patriots at all; nor could they be blamed. By word and by deed the Abolitionists were bearing witness every day that they little prized a Union linked together with manacles. The inference was reasonable that to break the manacles they would break the Union. But the Union was the country. How could lovers of their country even contemplate its dissolution? Yet that was what the Abolitionists were risking every time they aggravated Southern grievance by compassing the escape of slaves. How flagrantly they defied the stipulation of the bond may be seen in the fact that their underground railroad carried altogether some thirty to forty thousand slaves to freedom in Canada.[185]

These objections notwithstanding, the sect did have a love of country, albeit one that was subtle and visionary. In the formal cult of the nation they yielded to no other citizens. The symbols and trophies of the republic they revered. Its birthday and the birthday of the City Anti-Slavery Society they celebrated together.[186] They proposed toasts to the veterans of the Revolutionary War, dead and surviving. They had the Declaration of Independence solemnly declaimed. What distinguished them from other citizens participating in such rites was that they took them with religious gravity. To them the Declaration was no mere spread-eagle rhetoric; it was the nation's historic profession of faith, and as such they set its value above the value of the Constitution. Of that document the formal instrument of the Buffalo Anti-Slavery Society made no mention; it did affirm, however, that the national existence was based upon the principles of equality and freedom laid down in the Declaration.[187] Slavery, said William Mills in what was platitude in everything but practice, is opposed to those principles.[188] He was speaking to citizens assembled in January, 1838, in the Methodist Church at Newstead to protest the murder of Elijah Lovejoy; and though his sentiments were his own, they probably reflected those of his audience. They certainly reflected those of the Erie County Anti-Slavery Society at whose annual meeting he presided a few weeks later at Eden Corners. The Society there formally resolved that toleration of slavery by a republican government is a contradiction impairing the moral force of its principles and exposing it to the charge of hypocrisy.[189] To hasten the day when such a charge against their government would be no longer valid was the aim of the Abolitionists. They strove to make the country's practice conform to its profession in order that their patriotism be no longer embarrassed and that their pride as patriots might at last be consistent with their piety as Christians.

The Michigan Street Baptist Church

In 1832, when the City of Buffalo was incorporated, the Buffalo City Directory listed the names of sixty-eight colored heads of household. The pre-Civil War African American population of Buffalo was centered in the fourth ward--east of Main Street, north of South Division Street, and south of North Street. Michigan Street ran through the center of the residential area where African Americans lived. Although most of the City's African American population lived in the fourth ward, that area was not an all-black area. In fact, the vast majority of the residents of the fourth ward were white.

> In the second quarter of the nineteenth century Buffalo's free Black residents began to form a closely knit society concentrated in the Michigan-William Street area on the eastern fringe of the downtown commercial district. Hardly a recognized ethnic element at this time, the Negro population of the entire city numbered around 350 when the Michigan Street Baptist Church was built in 1845. Some Blacks who were domestic servants lived scattered throughout the city, but the majority listed in the 1840 census lived within two wards east of the central business district. A sociological study made by Niles Carpenter in 1927 shows that Buffalo's relatively small and cohesive Negro population continued to live and expand in the same area of the city at the end of the first quarter of the twentieth century.*

Early records of the region indicate that African Americans were present in the Buffalo area by the 1790s. Buffalo's location was a factor in attracting African Americans. Located in the far western, and at that time a fairly remote, part of the state, Buffalo was also just across the border from Canada. Those factors made the region very attractive to fugitive slaves as well as free people of color who wanted a quick escape route from bounty hunters.

African Americans helped to rebuild the city after it was destroyed by the British in the War of 1812. Blacks were present when the village was incorporated in 1822. When Buffalo was incorporated as a city in 1832, the city had two African American religious congregations. One of those congregations was a Baptist congregation. In 1845 that congregation moved into a newly constructed building at 511 Michigan Street. (Today that structure, pictured on the reverse side of this sheet, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It is the oldest structure in western New York that has been continuously occupied by African Americans).

Over the years the Michigan Street Baptist Church has been a central part of the history and culture of Buffalo's African American community. In the pre-Civil War period the church was a meeting place for a wide range of community social and cultural activities, and abolitionist and reform meetings. Although providing assistance to fugitive slaves was a violation of federal law, it was widely held that the Michigan Street Baptist Church was a station on the "underground railroad." By the late 19th century, such stories had attained legendary status.

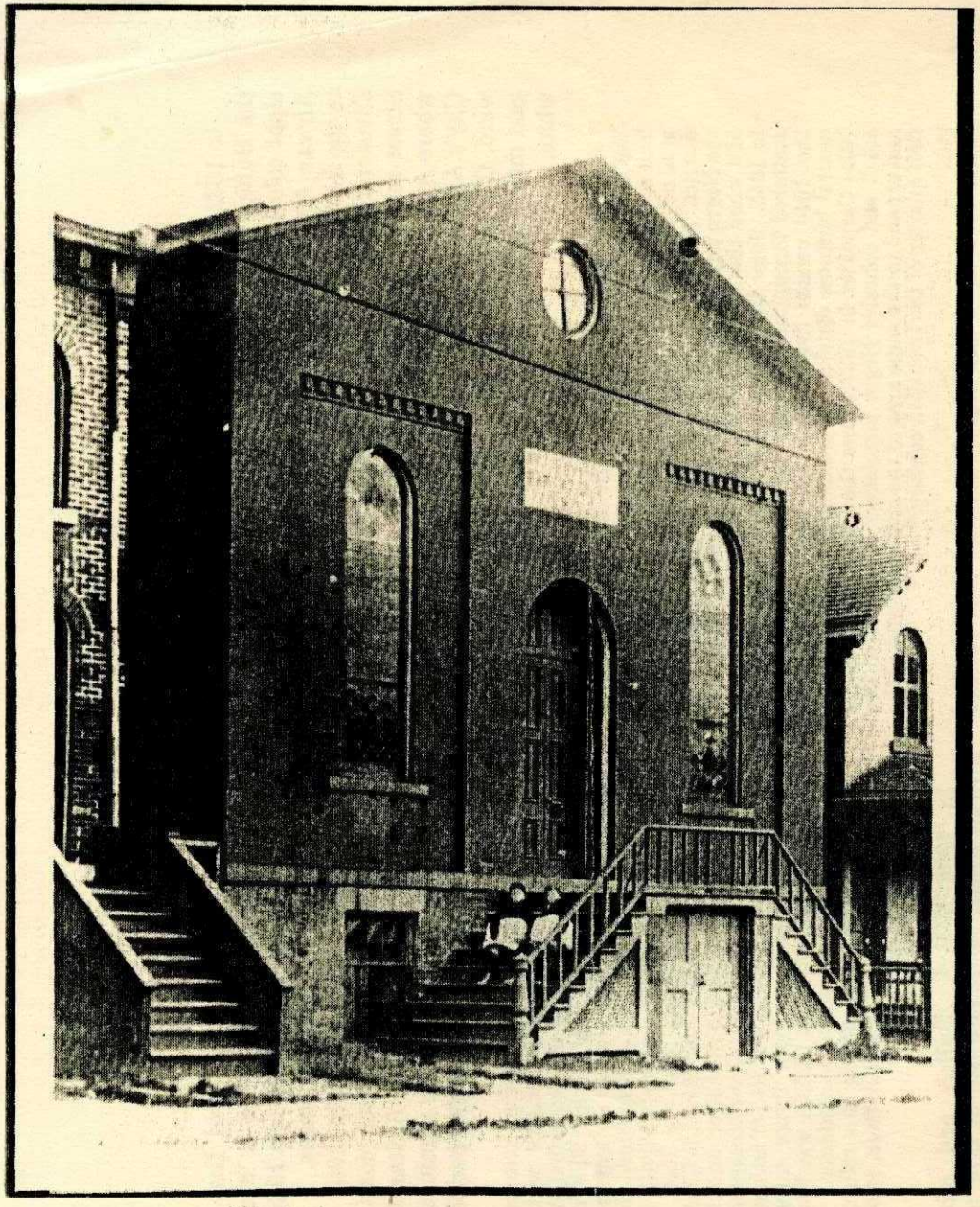
In the late 19th and early 20th century, the Michigan Street Baptist Church continued to loom large in the history of Buffalo's African American community. The National Registry nomination form highlights two developments from that period:

> At the turn of the century two compelling community figures became associated with the Michigan Street Baptist Church and contributed greatly to the politicization of Buffalo's Blacks. The first was the Rev. Dr. J. Edward Nash (1868-1957) who became pastor of the church in the 1890s and remained there for 61 years during which time he was instrumental in founding the Buffalo Urban League and the local branch of the N.A.A.C.P. In 1953 Potter Street behind the church was renamed Nash Street in his honor, and the National Conference of Christians and Jews presented him its annual Brotherhood Award in the field of human relations....
>
> The second prominent figure associated with the Michigan Street Baptist Church was Mary B. Talbert, a neighbor and an active parishioner. [Mrs. Talbert earned a national reputation as a reform activist]. Her house was at 521 Michigan Avenue, two doors from the church (now demolished).*

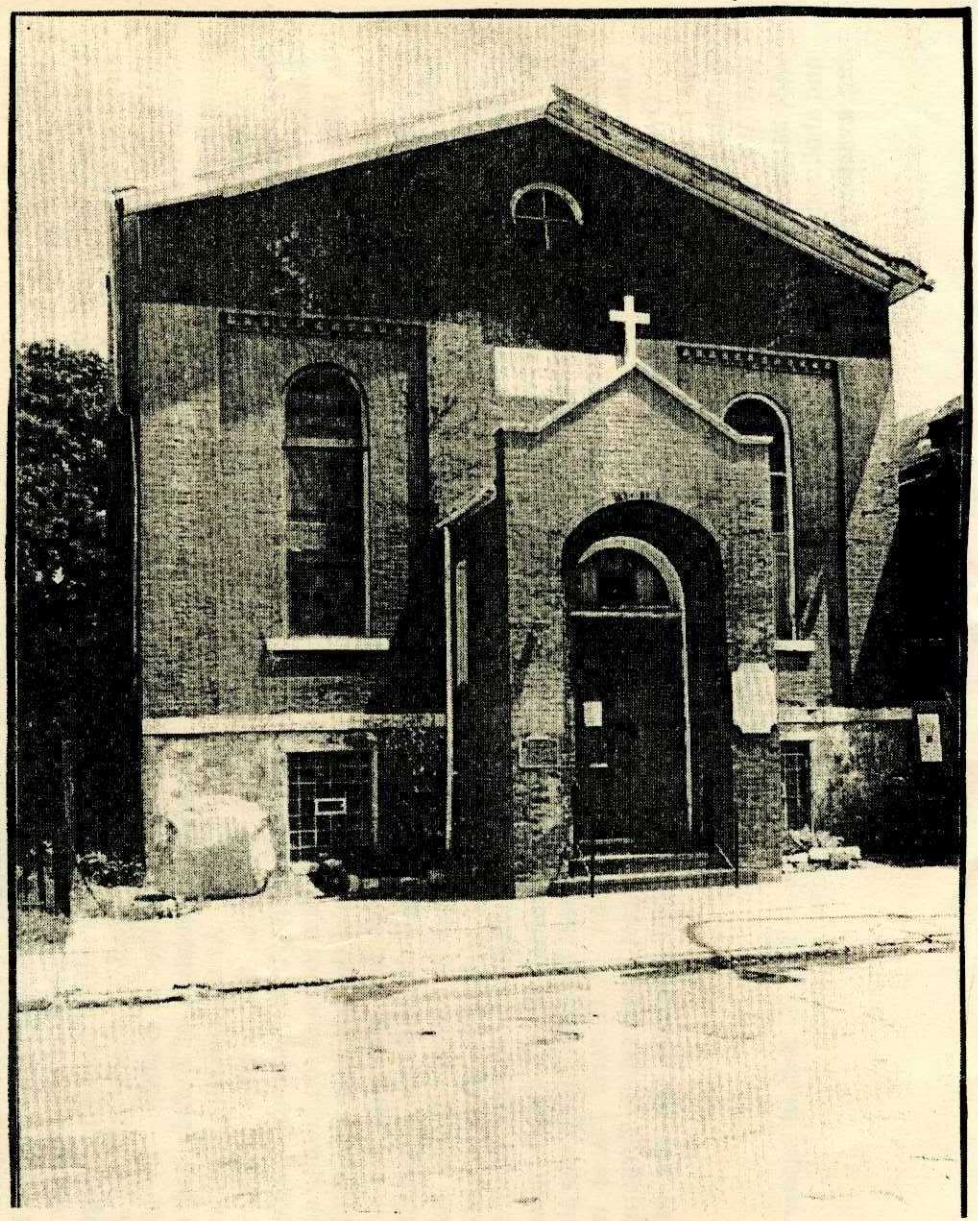
In 1905 W.E.B. DuBois and other prominent African American leaders met at Mrs. Talbert's home (521 Michigan Avenue) and adopted the resolutions that led to the founding of the Niagara Movement.

By the third decade of the 20th century the "Great Migration" and related factors had begun to transform historically small northern African American communities like that of Buffalo. By 1930 the African American population of Buffalo had grown to more than 13,000. As the northern black communities increased in size, the number of churches and other agencies serving those communities also increased. In time, other churches and community agencies began to assume some of the functions that the Michigan Street Baptist Church had performed for more than a century. Although the Michigan Street Church has given up center stage in community life, its significance in the 19th and early 20th century history of Buffalo's African American community should be celebrated and memorialized by all future generations. The Michigan Street Baptist Church was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. The Michigan Street Preservation Corporation is working to restore and preserve the site as a community landmark.

*Both quotes are from the National Register of Historic Places nomination form.



Michigan Street Baptist Church, circa 1890s
(photo from Buffalo Erie County Historical Society)



Michigan Street Baptist Church, 1996
(photo by George K. Arthur)

Michigan Street Preservation Corporation
511 Michigan Avenue
Buffalo, New York 14204

STORY OF THE "UNDERGROUND"

Not the New York Subway, nor yet the Chicago Tunnel, but a Buffalo Railroad.

Nov 21 —— 1904

MR. FOSDICK'S LECTURE

Principal of Masten Park High School recalls Memories of the old Slavery Days.

Professor Frank S. Fosdick, principal of Masten Park High School, entertained a large audience at the Historical building yesterday afternoon with a deeply interesting talk on The Underground Railroad. It wasn't the passenger subway in New York nor the freight tunnel in Chicago that he discussed, but the system that was operated in slavery days, assisting slaves to escape from their owners into Canada.

The basic influence that caused the underground railroad, the speaker said, were the fugitive-slave law of 1793 and the compromise fugitive-slave law of 1850, one result of the anti-slavery sentiment. Mr. Fosdick described the workings of the system whereby the runaway black men and women disappeared so mysteriously, being transported by night in all sorts of vehicles and in various guises and by roundabout routes from place to place of shelter. These places were known as stations, and the men who escorted the fugitives were conductors. The owners of the refuges were station agents and men who supplied money to the runaways to help them along were stockholders. There were higher officials in this railroad system, who corresponded to superintendents and division superintendents. These men gave the orders which the conductors and station agents carried out.

Mysterious Goings-on.

Professor Fosdick was proud to say that his father was one of the conductors. He recalled that when he was a very small boy, living with his parents at Virginia and Ellicott streets, there were many mysterious goings-on in the house at night about which his father counseled him to ask no questions. If he heard mysterious tapping on his father's bedroom window at night, he must not pay any attention to it. And if his father got up and dressed, tiptoed out and did not come back for several hours, that, too, must not be inquired into.

Many such instances occurred, but the speaker gave only two of them in detail. One was that of a man slave who escaped from a Tennessee planter and who was more than half dead from starvation and the strain of anxiety he had been under for weeks while being spirited northward. Mr. Fosdick's father, aided by another conducter named Joseph Adler, whose "run" was from the village of Boston to Buffalo, smuggled the fugitive across the river from a point near the foot of Austin street after some exciting adventures.

The other instance was that of a woman slave from Maryland, who had been pursued even more closely than the other unfortunate. Her escorts had but barely got started in their skiff across the Niagara when another boat put out from shore to head them off. The fugitive's conductors reached the dividing line first, then rested on their oars and waited for the other boat to come up. Her owner was in the other boat. He demanded his property. Her protectors defied him to claim her in Canadian waters and emphasized their defi with an old-fashioned double-barreled pistol, putting the men in the pursuing boat to rout.

Station at Utica and Linwood.

Professor Fosdick added additional local spice to his lecture by explaining a somewhat mysterious discovery that was made when, a few years ago, the house that stands at the northwest corner of Utica street and Linwood avenue was changed to a different position on the lot. Under the vestibule was a small, square inclosure, adjoining, but not communicating with, the cellar. The contractor who moved the house thought this inclosure must have been a sort of cistern, but an old Buffalonian, who attended the lecture, is authority for the explanation given by the speaker to his audience, which is to this effect:

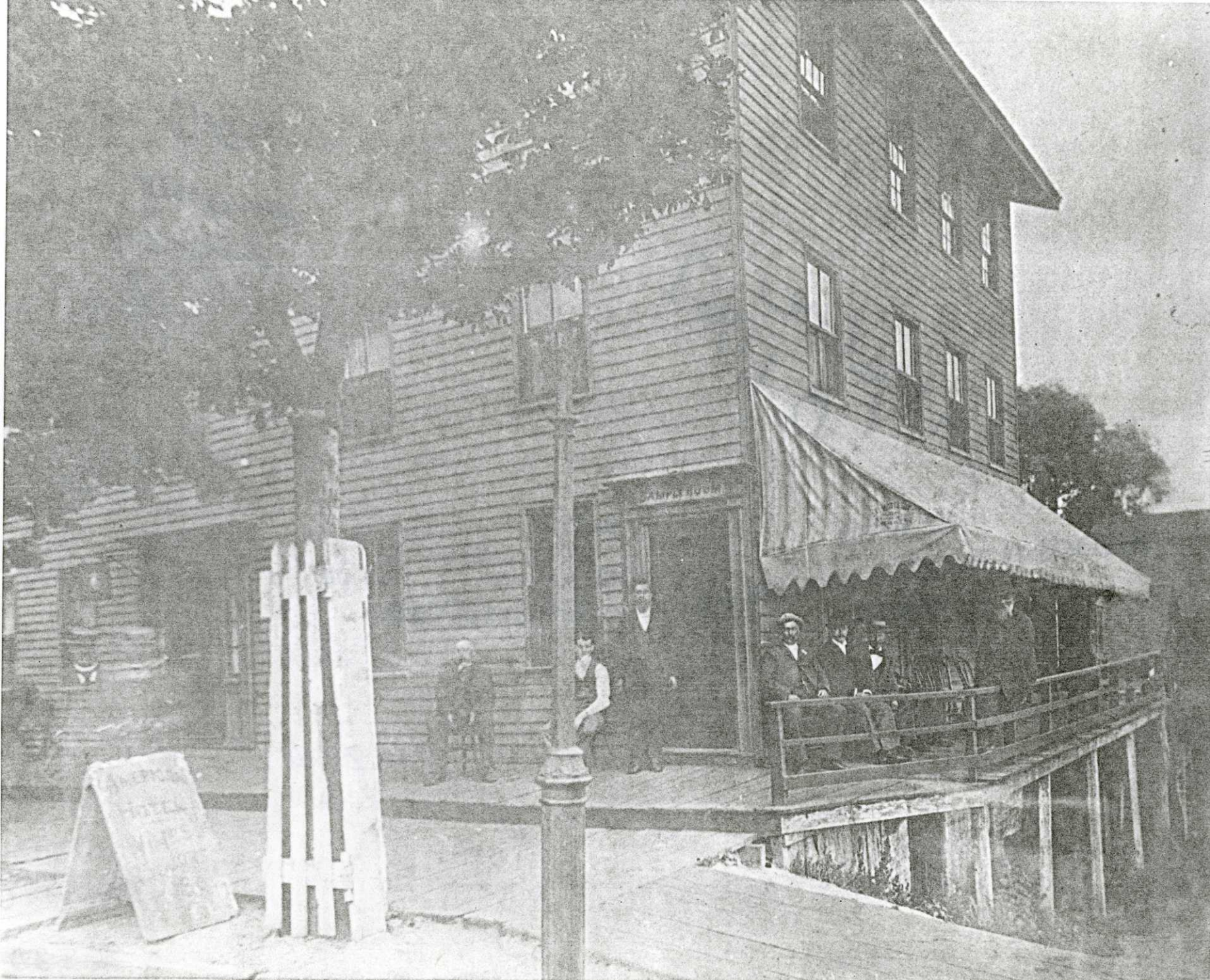
This house was at one time owned by Morris Butler, a station agent of the Underground Railroad. Black fugitives being conducted toward the river, if the slave-owners' spies or the law's agents got too close on the trail, were hastily conducted into Butler's house by way of the front door. Once the door closed behind them any number of officers could follow instantly, but would fail to find the fugitive. In the right wall of the vestibule was a panel, which in reality was a door controlled by a secret spring. When the outer door opened it swung against the panel, completely hiding it. But as soon as the outer door was closed, the secret spring was touched, the panel door, which was but twenty inches wide, opened and the negro was let down into the stone-walled vault under the vestibule, which could not be seen from the interior of the cellar proper or from the outside of the house.

The old inhabitant, who did not wish to give his name, said Morris Butler

Historical Society — Fosdick on the Underground

Buffalo Express — Mon. Morning Nov 21 - 1904 P. 8

Butler Home at Utica & Linwood



"WITHOUT SABLE ARMS WHERE WOULD WE BE"
P. Charles Wilson

A young boys eye lids were closed, covered by a sheet of ice. His lips blackened from the sub degree weather. Ice sickles hung from his chin. His frozen body stood erect, lifeless, but still a soldier. General George Washington approached young Jocko Graves, after crossing the Delaware river. He saw the lantern light, that had guided his way, still hanging from the sable arms of young Graves. Without sable arms where would we be.

They laughed, belittled, and ridiculed the American forces. They spoke openly and loudly of the number of British ships, soldiers, military plans. Every word, every sentence was heard by one who Ralph Ellison would call an "Invisible Man", American forces spy James Armistead. Mr Armistead provided this intelligence to General Marques de Lafayette, who in turn, was able to make the Battle of York Town a victorious one for the American forces. Without sable arms where would we be.

Bombs burst in air, rockets did flare, as the flag ship Lawrence was disabled. Cyrus Tiffany left the Lawrence with Commandant Oliver Hazard Perry, to board the Niagara, and fight on. Anthony Williams, felt the whiz of canons past him as he fought aboard the American schooner Somers. With the sable arms of Tiffany, Williams, and many other sable sailors, Commandant Perry's defeat of the British Naval forces on the Lake Erie was complete. Without sable arms where would we be.

Her sable arms were strong, her will determined, her courage limitless. But now she prepared a breakfast for a colonel who would go to die in battle with the Black men of the 54th Massachusetts. And after the storming of Fort Wagner, the same woman was a member of the burial party who laid Colonel Robert Shaw to rest, Harriet Tubman. Without sable arms where would we be.

He fought for his country, he fought hard for his people, this musician did. He was removed from the battle field, from his 317th Engineers, when a wound dictated that his next station would be a military hospital. Recovered, Jesse Clipper, returned to the battle field. He was gassed and once again taken to a military hospital where he succumbed, becoming the first Black Buffalonian to die in the first world war. Without sable arms where would we be.

VETERANS! BUFFALO QUARTERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY want to honor you, heap recognition on you, enough is never enough. You are what made, and continue to preserve this great country. Our celebration of freedom, at the Veterans Hospital, August 26, invitation only, is first and foremost to pay tribute to all veterans and second to remind everyone that....without sable arms where would we be.

We have a list of folks we know - all
written in a book
And every year at Christmas time we
go and take a look
And that is when we realize that these
names are a part
Not of the book they're written in
but of our very heart.

For each name stands for someone who
has crossed our path sometime
And in that meeting they've become the
"Rhythm of the Rhyme"
And while it sounds fantastic for us
to make this claim
We really feel we are composed of
EACH REMEMBERED NAME.

And while you may not be aware of
any special link
Just meeting you shaped my life more
than you can think
For once you've met somebody, the
years cannot erase
The memory of a pleasant word or of
a friendly face.

So never think my Christmas cards
are just a mere routine
Of names upon a Christmas list
forgotten in between
For when I send a Christmas card
that is addressed to you
It's because you're on that list of
folks I am indebted to.

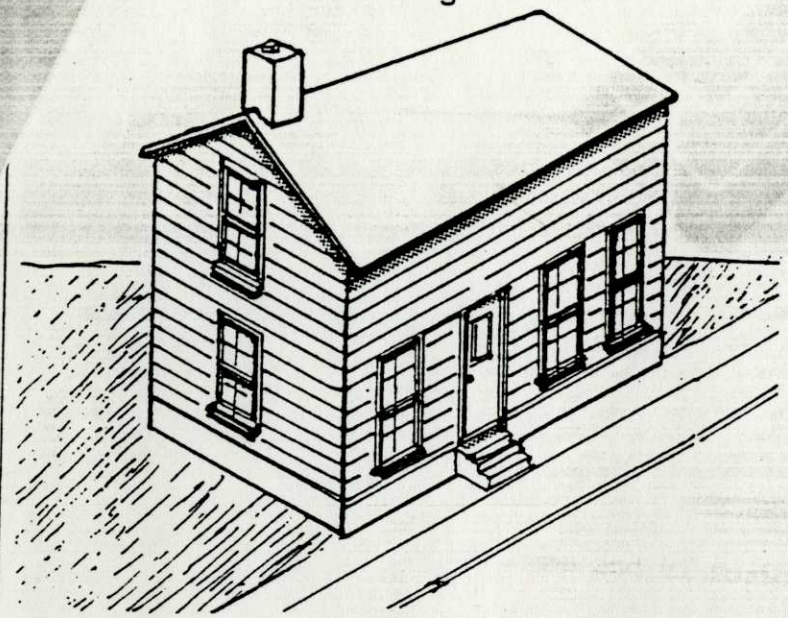
For I am but a total of the many
folks I've met
And you happen to be one of those I
prefer NOT to forget
And whether I have known you for
many years or few
In some way you have had a part in
shaping things I do.

And every year when Christmas comes
I realize anew
The BIGGEST GIFT life can give is
MEETING FOLKS LIKE YOU
And may the Spirit of Christmas that
forever and ever endures
Leave its richest blessings in the
hearts of YOU and YOURS.

...VIN (MAC) SIMPSON RESIDENCE

1840

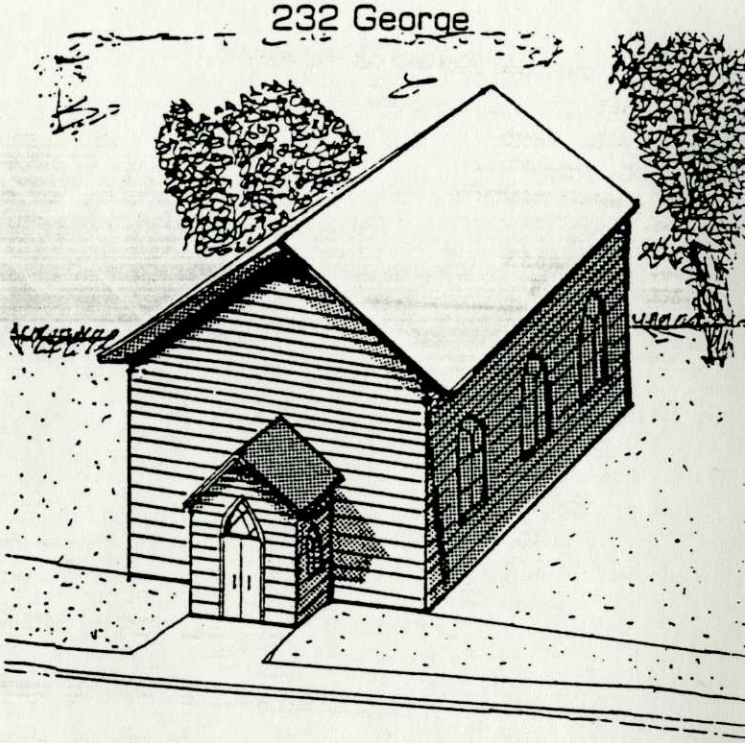
281 King



This is one of four buildings which has a history dating from the time when fugitive slaves were arriving almost weekly between 1830 and 1850. This is an example of a log and brick construction with its original clapboard siding.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH - 1843

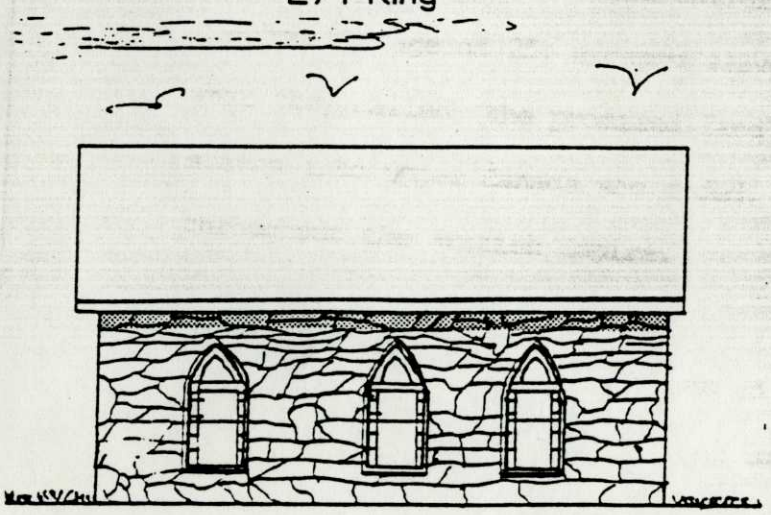
232 George



Built in 1843, it is one of the oldest Baptist churches in Ontario. Many of the congregation are descendants of escaped slaves. It is a combination style of meeting house type, Neo-classic style, and traditional English parish style.

NAZREY A.M.E. CHURCH - 1848

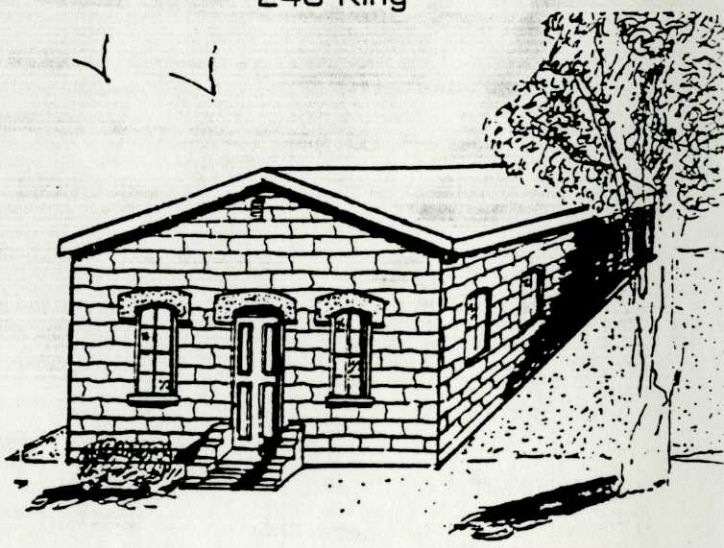
271 King



The church was built in 1848 by some of the escaped slaves who chose Amherstburg as their place for settlement. It is one of the oldest black churches still standing in all of

MOUNT BEULAH CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST - 1875

246 King



This building was used as a grammar school for children of fugitive slaves. Built in 1875 of local stone, it replaced a smaller log school. The policy of segregation was ended in 1912 when the Amherstburg Public School was

Canadian Black History Time Lines

1604 1606 Mattieu da Costa is the first known Black to come to Canada. He travels with the Champlain expedition to Port Royal as, most likely, a freeman.	**1853** Mary Ann Shadd is the first Black woman editor of a Canadian newspaper.
1628 Olivier Le Jeune is Canada's first officially recognized Black slave.	**1859** Abraham Shadd is the first Black Canadian elected to public office.
1734 Marie-Joseph Angelique, a slave girl in New France publicly tortured and hanged for allegedly setting fire to her master's house, brings attention to the horrific conditions of slavery in Canada.	**1860** The all-Black Victoria Rifle Corps is formed to defend British Columbia even though there is opposition to Black enrolment in the Army.
1770s Rose Fortune was Canada's first female law enforcement officer.	**1862** Large numbers of Black Canadians join the Union side in the Civil War. Anderson Ruffin, a Canadian trained doctor, is a surgeon for the Union Army.
1783 Over 5,000 free and enslaved Black United Empire Loyalists leave the U.S. for Canada after being promised freedom and land.	**1990s** Blacks help farm Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Canadian government expresses concern about the large number of Blacks coming to Canada.
1792 Failed promises of land cause Maritime Black Loyalists to leave Canada and migrate to Sierra Leone, West Africa.	**1914 1918** Black Canadian soldiers fight on the battlefields of World War 1 and face racism within their combat units. The all-Black Nova Scotia No.2 Construction Battalion is established.
1793 Upper Canada passes anti-slavery legislation forbidding the importation of slaves, but slavery is not abolished.	**1935 1945** Blacks fight in World War 11 and despite resistance, eventually join each arm of the Canadian armed services.
1796 600 Blacks travel from Jamaica to Halifax but the majority then migrate to Sierra Leone because of the inhuman living conditions, including the rocky land they could not farm in Nova Scotia.	**1963** Leonard Braithwaite is the first Black to serve in a Provincial Legislature, in Ontario.
1800 1860 Tens of thousands of Black Americans escape slavery in the U.S. via the Underground Railroad and come to Canada.	**1964** Leonard Braithwaite introduces a bill to rescind legislation permitting segregated schools in Ontario. Legislation was passed unanimously.
1830 Josiah Henson, the most renowned slave to escape to Canada, establishes the Dawn Settlement, a self-supporting Black community in Ontario.	**1975** Professor Wilson Head prepares one of the first sociological studies of the Black community for the Ontario Human Rights Commisson.
1833 The British Imperial Act abolishes slavery in Canada. The Act becomes effective the next year.	**1979** Lincoln Alexander is the first Black Cabinet Minister, later serving as the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario.
1837 Canadian government recruits Black militia units to help defend Upper Canada during the Mackenzie Rebellion of 1837.	**1983** The education ministry issues its first Black studies curriculum. The curriculum is not mandatory.
1849 Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave, makes 20 trips to the U.S. from her base in St. Catharines, Ontario, to help slaves escape.	**1984** The first African Canadian history film is produced. It is called, " A Proud Past, A Promising Future."
1850 Segregation in schools is legalized in The Common Schools Act, but Hamilton parents riot to have their children attend white schools.	**1992** Julius Alexander Isaac, is the first Black man appointed chief Justice, Federal Court of Canada.
	1994 The first formal celebration of Black History Month in Ontario. Initiated by the Ontario Black History Society.

Underground Railroad: The Freedom Train Stopped Here

February is Black History Month, and all across the nation the achievements and struggles of American blacks are being recalled with pride. Buffalo has played no small part in this saga; for escaped slaves in pre-Civil War days, the sight of Buffalo meant freedom was close at hand.

BY DEBORAH WILLIAMS

They were frightened, footsore and often hungry . . . but they risked severe beatings, even death, and endured days and nights spent hiding in closets and attics and near suffocation in grain wagons to reach their dream — Canada.

Canada meant freedom for the estimated 30,000 to 40,000 slaves who escaped from the pre-Civil War South through the network of "stations" on the Niagara Frontier, a "mecca" for those who rode the Underground Railroad. Just across the Niagara River lay Canada, "the Promised Land of Freedom" that bent, wizened Harriet Tubman sang of as she led her bands of fugitives out of bondage.

"Underground Railroad" was really a misnomer, for it was neither underground nor a railroad. It was a system for smuggling slaves through Northern states to freedom in Canada. Most of the runaways were transported in wagons and canal boats.

Because slave-hunters watched the key ports of Black Rock, Buffalo, Niagara Falls and Lewiston closely, many of the stations were in nearby towns. One was as far south as Rice Corners in the Town of Sardinia. It was run by farmer John Wilkes. His daughter, Mary Wilkes Furias, later recalled that on many a night she would hear a low rapping at the door of their house. Her father would go outside and immediately return to put on warm clothing and gather up some blankets. Then he would leave without telling his destination or the reason for his sudden departure. Returning in the morning, his team would be weary and his vehicles spattered with dirt or snow.

In later years, her father told her he had taken slaves to the next "underground" station, at Holland, where the operator was Abner Orr. Then they were sent on to another depot at South Wales after a night's rest.

There is little doubt that the homestead at East Quaker St. and Baker Rd. in Orchard Park, which Quaker abolitionist Obadiah Baker built in 1840, was such a station. Baker, an early settler, donated the land for the Quaker meeting house and cemetery.

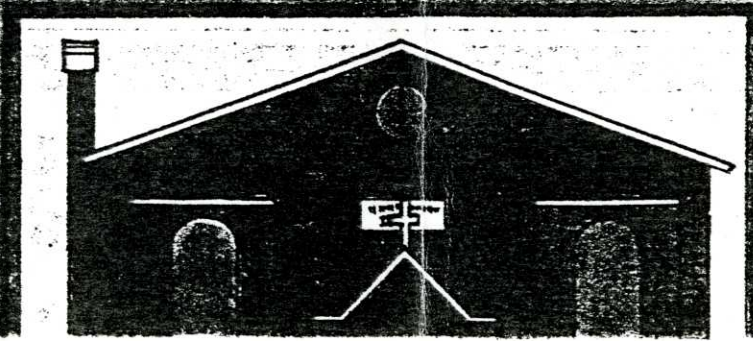
The trail to the Niagara River, by the way, also led through Orleans and Niagara Counties.

In 1830, long before the Underground was in full swing, two professional slave-catchers came to Lockport in search of a runaway. They could not find him but seized a popular barber and tried to take *him* South. He was rescued by workmen on the Erie Canal led by Darius Comstock. A Quaker, Comstock asserted, "This man will never be taken from Lockport," and he demanded a legal hearing. A justice of the peace ordered the barber freed and the slave-catchers left without their victim.

When the Underground began to operate on a large scale in the 1850s, Lockport became a haven for many runaways, although only one station has been authenticated to date. That was a stone house beside the Erie Canal at the end of Summit St. During the heyday of the Underground it was the home of Francis Hichens, who had been a canal contractor and also ran a glass factory. His house contained a secret stairway leading to a third-floor hiding place.

In 1861, Hichens was instrumental in saving from bondage a free Lockport black man who had worked for him. The man, Chancellor Livingstone, had been enticed to Kentucky to work on a farm in the belief that the border state was free soil. Despite the free papers he carried, however, his Southern employer declared Livingstone was his slave. Hichens set legal machinery in motion to prove that Livingstone was free and succeeded in getting him safely back to Lockport. He also obtained the arrest of the man who had lured Livingstone to Kentucky.

The most famous Underground station on the Niagara River was a massive stone house on the river-



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bank about one mile north of Lewiston, known as "Tryon's Folly." Amos Tryon, who settled in Lewiston about 1815, built the grand house on the river, but his wife preferred to live in the village despite the noble dimensions of their new home and its superb view. The strong-minded Mrs. Tryon refused to move, and the couple stayed in Lewiston.

The mansion remained unoccupied until Josiah Tryon, brother of Amos and pastor of the Lewiston Presbyterian Church, found a use for it. The Rev. Mr. Tryon was the local agent for the Underground, and "Tryon's Folly" soon had new inhabitants. None stayed very long . . . they were fugitive slaves.

The place was ideally located as both a hideout and a getaway point. It stood on the high bank of the river, had four levels below the main floor and was built on a terrrace-type design, with graduated extensions under the river side of the mansion. Joseph Tryon, who had the assistance of other ministers and abolitionists in the community, rowed many slaves across the river to Canada by boat. When word got around that there were slave-hunters in the neighborhood, the escapees were hidden in the various basements of the stone house until the coast was clear and they could be taken across by night.

Nearly all the narratives of the Underground speak of Buffalo or Black Rock as the terminus of a main line of the railroad. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 increased penalties for helping fugitive slaves. A fine of $1,000 and imprisonment for six months might be imposed for giving an escaped slave shelter or food. It was met by increased defiance from the Underground's agents and other involved in helping the movement.

Slave-hunters, sometimes federal officers, were so diligent in watching the riverfront that at times no safe crossing could be found anywhere between Buffalo and Lake Ontario. Dr. Eber M. Pettit, an Underground agent in Fredonia, left behind tales of the movement in this area:

"Dan was warmed and fed and secreted in the old house until it was deemed safe for him to go on, supposing the pursuers to have lost the track and abandoned the search. But not so; their spies were on the line watching every little skiff in Black Rock harbor, when friend Andrew, just at daylight having signaled the boatmen, left his carriage in a back street and led Dan through a narrow lane to where a boat lay hid, and out of the water. It was launched in a moment, and Dan and two boatmen were on their way to Canada before the spies watching the other boats could give the alarm."

There were a number of stations in Buffalo where the fugitives hid while waiting to cross the river. The red-brick Michigan Avenue Baptist Church, which still stands at 511 Michigan Ave., was founded in 1839 and completed in 1845. In its deep basement and pews many fugitives found sanctuary while waiting for their transportation to Canada.

The Morris Butler house, at the corner of W. Utica St. and Linwood Ave. (built in 1857 and since torn down), had two secret chambers, one on each side of the front door, that were accessible only from the cellar. Butler was said to have been the keeper of the last station of the Underground's existence.

Free blacks here once suspected another black of serving as a spy for Southern slave-owners. He came here from Detroit, but local blacks had been warned. A "reception committee" took him into some woods, now the site of Martin Luther King Park, and lashed him until he was nearly dead. He complained about his assailants, some of whom were arrested, but they were eventually released without trial.

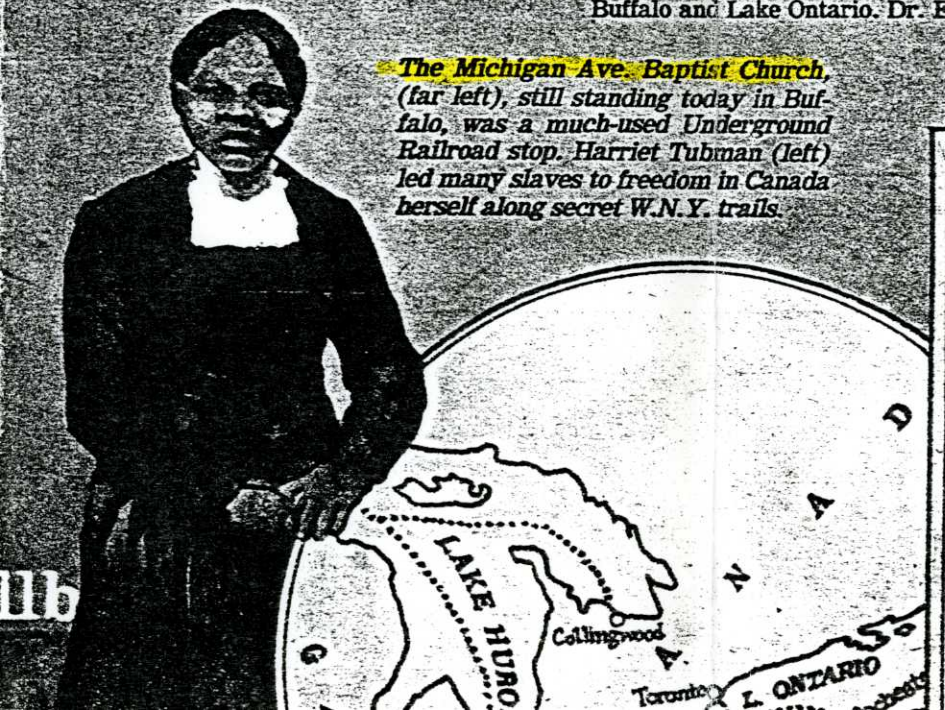
Dr. Pettit, in his *Sketches of the Underground Railroad,* tells about another successful escape from federal agents:

"A Niagara Falls underground agent was a wealthy gentleman living some

Continued on page 18

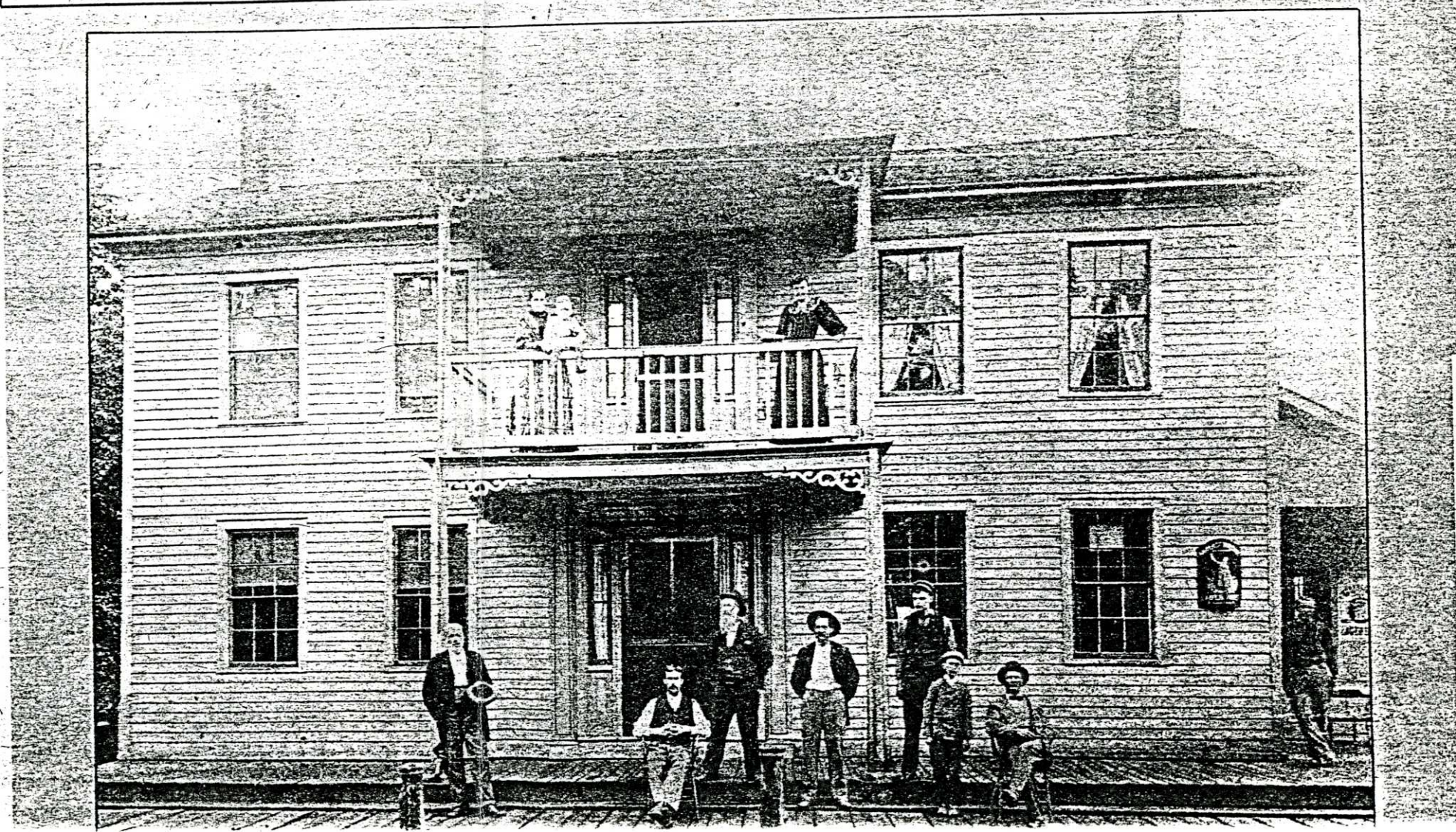
ILLUSTRATION/JANE MARINSKY

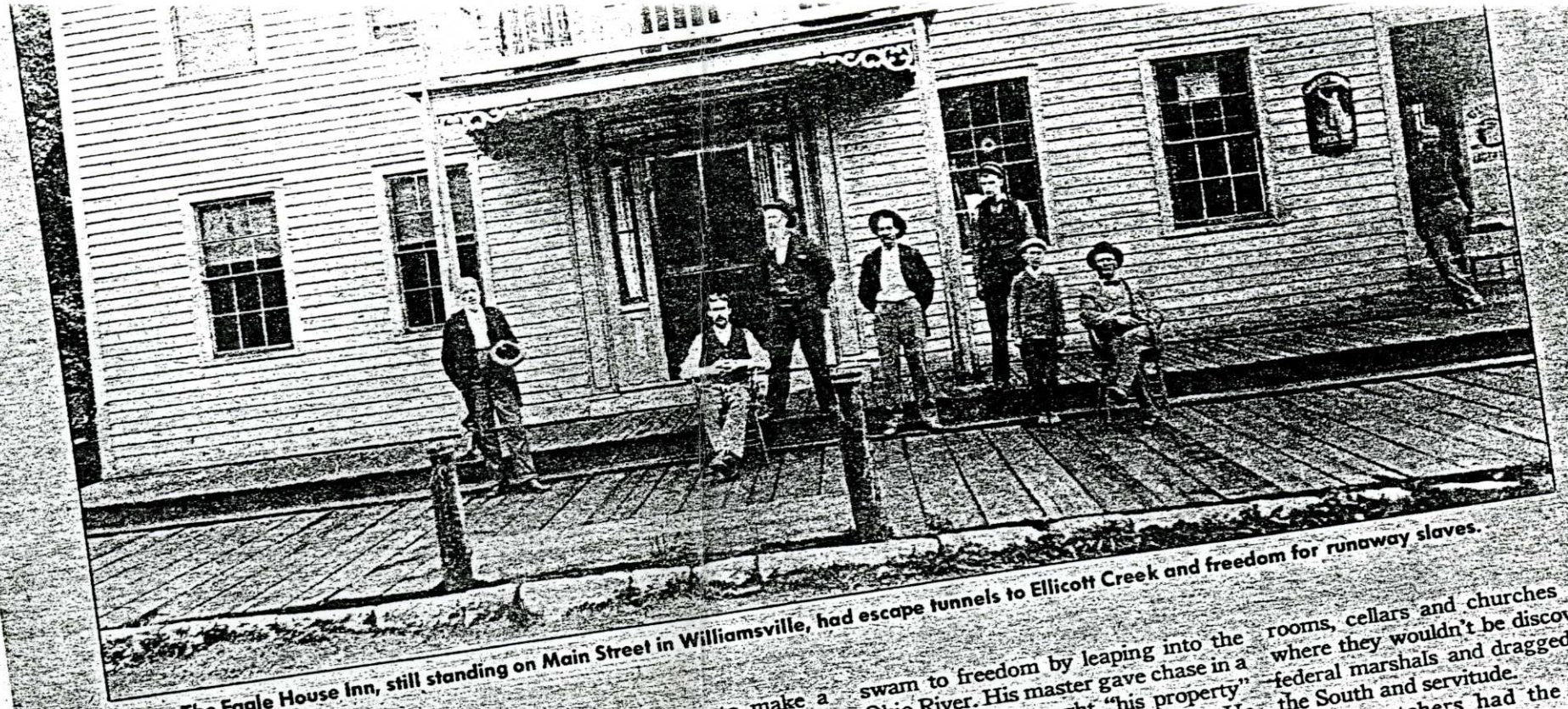
The Michigan Ave. Baptist Church, (far left), still standing today in Buffalo, was a much-used Underground Railroad stop. Harriet Tubman (left) led many slaves to freedom in Canada herself along secret W.N.Y. trails.



Buffalo

Buffalo: Freedom Station on





The Eagle House Inn, still standing on Main Street in Williamsville, had escape tunnels to Ellicott Creek and freedom for runaway slaves.

By SHEILA M. LEWIS

KUNTA KINTE TRIED TIME and again to escape from slavery. The punishments for these attempts were barbarous. He suffered floggings which tore the flesh from his back and amputation of half his foot at the hands of merciless slave hunters. The African's intense desire for freedom was shared by many slaves.

Some walked their way out of bondage — fleeing through the darkness, hiding in woods, sleeping in barns, and stealing corn from the fields. One runaway slave took a year to trudge from Alabama to Ohio. Others, like Henry "Box" Brown made ingenious escapes. In 1849, he paid a white shoe dealer to make a crate and ship him in it to Philadelphia abolitionists.

Runaway blacks often found sanctuary with sympathetic northerners. After the disappearance of a servant from his Virginia plantation, George Washington complained about a group of Pennsylvania Quakers who were sheltering fugitives.

Anti-slavery sentiment had been rising in the North since Colonial times. During the 1850's, a movement calling for the end of human bondage became popular. The supporters of this cause, known as abolitionists, smuggled slaves from the South to safety on the Underground Railroad.

In the early 1830's, a Kentucky slave swam to freedom by leaping into the Ohio River. His master gave chase in a boat but never caught "his property" who waded ashore in Ripley, Ohio. He quickly disappeared, aided by the liberty-loving Ohioans. The slaveholder supposedly said, "He must have gone the underground road." The first steam railway in America had been recently completed and the phrase was changed to "Underground Railroad".

IT WAS A SERIES of secret routes traveled by the fugitive slaves. The hideouts along the way, called stations, were usually the private homes of the abolitionists. The refugees were concealed in farm houses, barns, secret rooms, cellars and churches — anywhere they wouldn't be discovered by federal marshals and dragged back to the South and servitude.

Slave catchers had the right to search private homes and reclaim runaways under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Helping a black escape could have meant a $1,000 fine — a considerable sum in those days — and six months in prison. This harsh law, signed by Buffalo's Millard Fillmore, sent thousands of refugees streaming into Canada where slavery had been outlawed.

Before the law was a fortnight old, it was reported locally that in a 2 to 3 day period neraly 100 blacks had slipped through Buffalo into Ontario. The

the Underground Railroad

escapees used two main routes to get over the border. Some followed the shiplanes down Lake Erie, while others came down the mountains of northern Pennsylvania into the hills of the Southern Tier.

Quite naturally, the Niagara Frontier became an important terminus for "the railroad without rails or locomotives". Its secret cargo entered Canada by crossing Lake Erie at Dunkirk, ferrying across the Niagara River at Black Rock or rowing across at Lewiston.

A runaway slave was seized near Jamestown in 1851 and taken back in irons to his southern master. This incident stirred the Chautauqua abolitionists into action and Jamestown became an early center of the movement.

OLEAN, ALSO A KEY hub for underground railroad operations, was most unhospitable to slave catchers. The reminiscences of James G. Johnson, innkeeper and one of the town's leading citizens, includes an episode about four young blacks who came to his hotel for food and assistance.

Two Virginia planters, chasing the boys, rode up while they were eating in the kitchen of the inn. Johnso hunters on a wild-goose ch the Alleghany Road. Returnin ours later empty-handed, they were refused lodging and their guide was given the tar and feathers treatment.

"Slave catchers had the right to search private homes and reclaim runaways under the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 . . . This harsh law, signed by Buffalo's Millard Fillmore, sent thousands of refugees streaming into Canada where slavery had been outlawed."

Spirited from station to station, hidden under straw or blankets in wagons or sleighs, the runaways often stayed at the farm of Benjamin Baker, a Quaker leader in Orchard Park. The quiet but resourceful Society of Friends would take them under cover of darkness to Williamsville or directly to Buffalo.

Continued on page 14