

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN MASSACHUSETTS

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MOST of the fugitive slaves who passed through the New England states on their way to Canada and secure freedom crossed some section of Massachusetts by means of the so-called "Underground Railroad." The operatives of this curious combination of variable routes were, of course, abolitionists, whose pity for the oppressed slave impelled them to welcome and conceal him on his arrival at their doors, attend to his needs, and, a night or two later, hitch up their teams and convey him to some trusted friend a few miles farther on.

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. The increasing supply of fugitives who came to New England was brought by sailing vessels engaged in trade with our South Atlantic seaboard, and in some instances from the West Indies. 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, Charleston, Wilmington, North Carolina, and Portsmouth and Norfolk, Virginia. Of course, some of the stowaways were discovered on board ship and were returned to bondage. Among these we may mention Peter, who secreted himself on the British ship *Wilson* at Charleston, bound for Liverpool. He was found and handed over to the brig *Reporter*, sailing to Boston, after being two days out, with the request that on arrival at that port he be transferred to the first vessel going South. Accordingly he was placed on

* For a more lengthy treatment of this subject by Professor Siebert and a map of the underground routes, see *Proceedings*, American Antiquarian Society, New Series XLV, Part 1, 25-100: Wilbur H. Siebert, "The Underground Railroad in Massachusetts."

the brig *Woodstock* and was landed at Savannah on July 9, 1841.¹

The New England ports of entry for fugitives were Boston, some town on Cape Cod, Wareham, New Bedford, Fall River, Newport, Providence, and on the Connecticut coast Norwich, Deep River, New Haven, and Greenwich. In all these landing places the runaways were doubtless inclined to linger if they found friends and employment, but many were forwarded inland from one centre to another until they were widely scattered through the towns and villages of Massachusetts and the adjoining states. Many others were not content until they had found refuge in Canada, the slave's "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.²

Numbers of the runaways remained in New England and other parts of the North in comparative peace and content-

¹ Savannah *Georgian*, July 9, 1841; *Niles' National Register*, LX, 304.

² Library of the University of Michigan: Henry Bibb's paper, *The Voice of the Fugitive*, file of 1851-1852; *Dalhousie Review* (January, 1926), 531.

ment until the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. Then there was a mad rush for the queen's dominions, although a surprisingly large residue chose to remain under the insecure protection afforded them in localities where anti-slavery sentiment was strong. Sometimes active friends of the slave threw prudence to the winds by attempting the rescue of an apprehended fugitive from the court-room. Josiah Quincy, who defended one shortly after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793, tells us that he "heard a noise" and turning around saw the constable lying on the floor and a passage opening through the crowd, by which the fugitive departed without stopping to hear the court's opinion.³

As early as 1819 runaways were arriving at New Bedford by water. They were still disembarking there twenty-seven years later, coming in every week, according to John Bailey, who says that they drew heavily on the resources of the local abolitionists. By 1851 the colored inhabitants of the town numbered between six and seven hundred, a large part of them being refugees. Hence, in March of the year named, New Bedford was much agitated by the news from Boston that a vessel, with deputy United States marshals and a hundred armed men on board, had left Charlestown Navy Yard for that or a neighboring port in quest of fugitives.

Although the expected vessel did not appear in the harbor, "a very large number" of these people departed for Canada during the next five weeks, and at the end of that time still more were preparing to go. In their distress they received the sympathy and aid of many of the wealthiest and most respectable citizens of the town.⁴ Some of these fugitives were from Portsmouth, Virginia, where Eliza Bains, who worked for sea-captains, got numbers of slaves on board vessels bound for New Bedford and Boston. One of the most

³ *Boston Globe*, September 15, 1900.

⁴ Leonard B. Ellis, *History of New Bedford, Massachusetts*, (Syracuse, 1892), 306; *Liberator*, March 20, 1846; *Boston Commonwealth*, March 16, 1846.

noted fugitives who spent some time in these centres was Henry Box Brown. Having found that his family was gone when he returned home from his work in Richmond, Virginia, he paid a friend eighty-three dollars to ship him in a box to another friend in Philadelphia. From there he was sent to Boston and later to New Bedford, where he remained a few weeks under the care of Joseph Pinkerston before returning to the former city.

The escape of Henry Box Brown occurred in 1848. Ten years before there had appeared in New Bedford a fugitive from Baltimore, who was to win fame under the name of Frederick Douglass. On the streets of New York City he had met another fugitive from Baltimore, who had narrowly escaped being taken back to bondage. This fugitive warned him that New York was full of southerners, that hirelings were on the lookout for runaways, and that he must not trust the black people of the city. When Douglass's few dollars were nearly gone, he confided in a sailor named Stewart, who took him to his house and soon introduced him to David Ruggles, then the secretary of the New York Vigilance Committee. He remained with Mr. Ruggles several days until his marriage with Anna, to whom he had written to come on from Baltimore.

It was Mr. Ruggles who advised him to seek work in New Bedford and gave him a note of introduction to Nathan Johnson, a colored man of that place. Just a fortnight after his flight from Maryland Frederick and his wife were with the Johnsons and enjoying the sense of freedom and security that came from finding themselves among Quakers. Mr. Johnson assured Frederick that no slave-holder could take a slave from New Bedford, and that "the colored people themselves would fight for their liberty to the death." Frederick was not slow in noticing that the children of both races went to school together.

He worked at a variety of jobs, attended and took part in the meetings of the colored people, joined a group of them

known as the Zion Methodists, among whom he became a class-leader and local preacher, read the *Liberator* with thoroughness and delight, was present at all anti-slavery meetings, and in the summer of 1841 attended a great convention at Nantucket. Being invited to speak before this body, he did so with fear and trembling, but so impressed his hearers that Garrison took him as his text and astonished his audience with the convincing power of his impromptu address. After the meeting Frederick was solicited to become an agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, and accepted. His first mission was to travel and lecture in company with George Foster through the eastern counties of Massachusetts for the purpose of securing subscribers to the *Liberator* and the *Anti-Slavery Standard*.⁵ Thus he began his distinguished career.

From New Bedford the underground route extended northwest to Fall River. There Samuel Curry and Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Buffum Chace were operators for eight or nine years, when the Chaces removed to Valley Falls, Rhode Island, and continued their nocturnal labors by receiving the fugitives brought to them by Robert Adams, of Fall River. Valley Falls was also supplied with fugitives from Providence and Pawtucket. Mr. Chace frequently put his passengers in charge of a trusted conductor on the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad for transfer at Worcester to the Fitchburg line. Another underground route from Fall River ran up to Barrowsville (Norton Post Office), thence to Attleboro, North Attleboro, Medfield, and onward; and another followed the Taunton River up to Taunton, where it turned sharply westward to unite with the former at Barrowsville.

Southeast of Worcester a secret thoroughfare entered Massachusetts from Norwich, on the Thames River. The fugitives came to Norwich by water and went ashore for the

⁵ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York, 1855), 338, 340-343, 345, 347-350, 352-356, and 357-360.

overland trip to Worcester either by the New York and New England Railroad, transportation being provided them by the local workers, or by the usual night service, with stops at Hanover, Canterbury, and Brooklyn, or at Hanover, Willimantic, Hampton, and Brooklyn. While the Reverend Samuel J. May, "the Lord's chore boy" as he was called by his brother-in-law, Bronson Alcott, held his pastorate in Brooklyn from 1822 to 1836, he passed fugitives on to Effingham L. Capron at Uxbridge, Massachusetts, whence they proceeded northwestward to Worcester. Mr. Capron had previously been a leading member of the Smithfield monthly meeting of Friends in Rhode Island.

Both the city and county of Worcester were strongly anti-slavery from at least the middle of the 1830's. How many of the numerous Quakers of the city engaged in defeating the Fugitive Slave Law is not known; certainly a few did. One of these was Edward Earle, and probably another was Charles Hadwen, who lived a little way out of town at some distance from any traveled road. He was deeply interested "in the cause of the oppressed" and was a friend of Elizabeth Buffum Chace, whom he visited at Fall River late in December, 1838. She read to him a manuscript she had written concerning a slave who had lived there for some time and had then departed for Canada. He had run away with his two brothers for fear of being sold South, but he had lost them and thought they had been caught. Mr. Hadwen wrote to Angelina Grimké Weld on January 1, 1839 that some persons in Worcester were alive to the sufferings of the slave and were doing what their hands found to do. His sisters, Eliza and Lucy Earle, were "much engaged in societies for the Slave, as well as Sarah Earle." The colored people held a lyceum in Worcester and attended well the weekly lectures given by their friends.⁶

⁶ *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844*, Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, Editors, (New York, 1934), II, 736-737.

Another birthright member of the Society of Friends who sheltered fugitives in the suburbs of Worcester was Abby Kelly Foster, but she was disowned for her radicalism. In 1847 she and her husband, Stephen Foster, bought seventy-five acres of land at the foot of Barton Hills in Tatnuck, now within the city limits. In the cellar of their house they had a secret vault, entered only through a trap-door in the floor above, in which they hid such refugees as were brought to them. Hence they named their place "Liberty Farm." It was to them that Thomas Wentworth Higginson, while pastor of the "Free Church" in Worcester, drove at night with the fugitives consigned to him. Mr. Higginson has told in print that a pretty young slave woman, apparently white, and her "two perfectly white children" were sent to him from Boston under the care of a pro-slavery Worcester merchant, who was ignorant of the fact that he was violating the law by attending them on the train. They remained with the Higginsons all winter, and the woman later married a tradesman near Boston. The abolitionists of Worcester encouraged fugitives to dwell among them and prevailed upon some to do so even after their chances of security had been greatly decreased by the law of 1850.⁷

The northern part of Worcester County had "a number of unseen highways" for the wayfarers from the South. These highways were laid out by Deacon Joshua T. Everett, of Westminster, and other men of the county. Undoubtedly Westminster maintained underground connections with Worcester to the south, Fitchburg to the northeast, and North Ashburnham to the northwest. So also Medfield seems to have been in traffic communication with Southborough and Concord. At Concord Mr. and Mrs. Francis E. Bigelow, Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Brooks, Miss Mary E. Rice, and Ephraim Allen were deep in the work in coöperation with the Rever-

⁷ Bostonian Society, Old State House, Boston: An article in a scrap-book, "Doomed is Slave Dungeon.—Liberty Farm Hiding Place to be Torn Down"; T. W. Higginson in the *Atlantic Monthly* (March, 1897), 348.

end Joel S. Bingham, Jonathan Drake, and Joel Smith, all of Leominster. Others at Concord who gave shelter to fugitives were A. Bronson Alcott, Henry D. Thoreau, and Abiel Heywood Wheeler, the father of Mary E. Wheeler, artist and educator. Mr. Wheeler "helped to run the local Underground Railway"; while Mr. Thoreau not only harbored an occasional runaway in his cabin at Walden Pond but also in his house in the village, where the Reverend Moncure D. Conway was permitted to see one receiving the attentions of the family. Shortly after the "Martyr's Service," which was held in the town hall for John Brown, December 2, 1859, Thoreau aided the fugitive Meriam to escape to Canada, as he had several others in former years. It was for the "Martyr's Service" that Frank B. Sanborn wrote his dirge, beginning,

To-day beside Potomac's wave,
 Beneath Virginia's sky,
 They slay the man who loved the slave
 And dared for him to die.⁸

Mr. Alcott was ingenious to record in his diary in February, 1847, the fact that he had kept a refugee for a week, employing him at sawing and piling wood until the negro lost confidence in his safety and left for Canada.

From Leominster the "unseen highway" led to Fitchburg, where Mr. and Mrs. Samuel S. Crocker, Benjamin Snow, and other receivers of runaways forwarded them to Alvin Ward of North Ashburnham, who put them on the steam cars for Canada. Before daylight one Sunday morning, in February, 1851, Mr. Bigelow arrived from Concord at the house of Mr. Drake with Shadrach, who had been rescued from the courthouse in Boston by a crowd of men of his own color. As he stepped from the carriage Shadrach wore an old silk hat of Mr. Brooks. At church time his appearance was completely

⁸ Edward W. Emerson, *Henry David Thoreau, 1817-1862* (London, 1917), 68; F. B. Sanborn, *Henry D. Thoreau* (Boston, 1882), 195; Blanche E. Wheeler Williams, *Mary C. Wheeler, Leader in Art and Education* (Boston, 1934), 23-24.

changed, for he was in feminine apparel in order that he might attend service with Mrs. Drake. There she introduced him to friends as "Mrs. Brown." From Leominster the rescued slave was driven by one of Mr. Crocker's workmen to North Ashburnham, where he lay sick for a few days in Mr. Ward's attic before being able to resume his journey to Canada.

Boston was a noted rendezvous for the refugees, who came not only from southern ports but also from Baltimore by way of Philadelphia, and from underground stations much closer home. The *Report* of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society for 1848 states that "the ranks of emigration from the South" were yearly swelling their numbers, and the *Report* of the same society two years later declares that the tide of slaves, which had been flowing for so many years from the South to the North, especially since the inception of the anti-slavery movement, "continues to pour in swelling flood." Where one slave had escaped in 1830 probably fifty were doing so in 1850. Of these runaways Boston was getting its full share.

The Reverend James Freeman Clarke tells us that there were many places in Boston where these people were cared for, 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. Mrs. George S. Hillard, whose husband was a United States commissioner, hid fugitives in the attic of their home, at Number 62 Pinckney Street; Francis Jackson sheltered many in a room of his house, at Number 31 Hollis Street; William I. Bowditch kept them in his home and passed most of them on to William Jackson at Newton; Elizur Wright, editor of the *Commonwealth*, harbored them in his house, as did also Theodore Parker, who lived for years at Number 1 Exeter Place. They were also often secreted in a room over the *Liberator* office, at Number 21 Cornhill. These instances illustrate the hospitality provided by prominent white men

of Boston for their temporary black lodgers, but most of the entertainment for such persons was provided by the colored people living on the north side of Beacon Hill. Of these the most hospitable was the fugitive slave, Lewis Hayden, who lived at Number 66 Southac (later Phillips) Street. He had runaways almost constantly at his house, and when Harriet Beecher Stowe called there in 1853, she saw thirteen newly arrived slaves of all colors and sizes. Another prominent underground agent of the same race was the Reverend Leonard A. Grimes, the pastor of the Fugitive Slave Church in Boston. Many more negro befrienders of fugitives are named by Francis Jackson, the treasurer of the Boston Vigilance Committee, in his cash-book.⁹

Immediately after the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 the underground operations in Boston were organized to a considerable extent by the vigilance committee, which was formed early in October of that year by fifty men under the presidency of Deacon Timothy Gilbert, with Charles List as secretary, Mr. Jackson as treasurer, and Austin Bearse, a Cape Cod sea-captain, as agent, door-keeper, collector of supplementary funds, and rescuer of stowaways from coasting vessels in Boston Harbor. This committee, largely through the efforts of Theodore Parker, rapidly increased its membership to more than two hundred men, some of whom were residents of outlying cities and towns. Its service continued during a period of nearly ten and a half years, with Captain Bearse performing its most dangerous exploits, occasionally in company with noted members of the committee.

When notified that a fugitive was on some vessel lying off Fort Independence or elsewhere in the harbor, the captain sailed in his yacht *Moby Dick* or his later one, *Wild Pigeon*, took him off as best he could, and usually landed with him at South Point, South Boston, near the Bearse home. Either

⁹ James Freeman Clarke, *Anti-Slavery Days* (New York, 1884), 83. Mr. Jackson's cash-book is in the possession of the Bostonian Society, in the Old State House, Boston.

on the yacht or at the house the slave discarded his plantation garments of tow for something better and less noticeable. He was then given into the hands of committee-men, whose closed carriage was waiting to take him to a hiding place in the city or in a suburban town. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a member of the committee, mentions the *Flirt* as a yacht which belonged to Captain Bearse for the rescue of slaves and for cruising off the Maine coast with captured slave-hunters on board until they should become obedient to the orders of the committee. The captain does not name this boat.

In one instance Mr. Bearse was threatened with perdition by the commander of a vessel in case he came alongside for the stowaway. He sailed back to Long Wharf for a force of negroes but, failing to obtain his recruits, nailed a dozen seamen's coats and hats to his railing, and proceeded again down the harbor in the dim light of early morning. His only companion was his brother. When near the vessel, the brother rowed the yacht's boat to its side and demanded the refugee. The ruse worked and the negro was promptly handed over.¹⁰

On October 6, 1850, Theodore Parker told his congregation in the Melodeon that from four hundred to six hundred fugitive slaves in Boston were exposed to the operation of the drastic new law which provided for their rendition, and that some had already fled. He also said that some of them belonged to his flock, and that he would act with any body of serious men to resist the law in any manner not involving the use of deadly weapons. Some of his colleagues in the vigilance committee were not averse to using firearms, and one of them fired the shot which killed a deputy-marshal in the court-house in the attempted rescue of Anthony Burns.

The wretched situation of the fugitives in various Massachusetts towns at this time is suggested in the following:

Who can describe the distress and anguish of this persecuted class in Boston, Worcester, New Bedford, and the other princi-

¹⁰ Austin Bearse, *Reminiscences of Fugitive Slave Law Days in Boston* (Boston, 1880), 34, 36.

pal towns where large numbers of them were gathered for the sake of employment! They were afraid to remain even in places where a formidable anti-slavery sentiment existed, for no man could guarantee to them protection against the well-framed wickedness of the law. They might stay and take their chance of a popular manifestation, which, in case of arrest, might paralyze the arm that held them, or they might sacrifice everything, and fly, dreading the unreliable temper of the people. Some of the boldest chose to remain, and armed themselves to defend their freedom, instinctively calculating that the sight of such an exigency would make the Northern heart beat too rapidly for prudence. Sometimes it did so: but it was nothing for this race of men who had hitherto been uniformly betrayed to depend upon. More than forty fled from Boston alone, within three days from the signing of the Bill by the President. The anti-slavery men of the State had to sustain the double affliction of the Bill itself, and the misery of its victims; but it brought upon the negroes expatriation, the sacrifice of little properties, a loss of employment, the sudden disruption of family ties, and an uncertain and melancholy future.¹¹

The forty above referred to as having fled at once from Boston belonged to the Fugitive Slave Church the rest of whose members scattered in all directions. The pastor of that church raised enough money to purchase the freedom of some of his parishioners and thus induced them to return to the city.

In March, 1851, Wendell Phillips wrote to a friend that the rescue of Shadrach had "set the public afire," and that there were some hundreds of fugitives in Boston. He had been asked his advice about fleeing by a free colored woman of seventy, for she was fearful of being seized by mistake. He said that it was horrible "to see the distress of families torn apart" at that inclement season, the husband being "forced to leave good employment, and seek not employment so much as the chance of it in the narrow, unenterprising, and over-

¹¹ John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker* (New York, 1864), II, 91-92.

stocked market of Canada." The vigilance committee was meeting every night. The escapes of fugitives had been providential. Since Shadrach's rescue nearly a hundred had left the city. The way the committee received news of warrants for the arrest of runaways was surprising. One officer had boasted to a member whom he did not know to be such that a certain refugee would be arrested by one o'clock, but the member reported it and by twelve o'clock the intended victim "was steaming it on iron lines to Canada." Another came out of his employer's store on a wharf, saw his master and heard him whistle, dived into the cellar, issued from the back door, and was not heard of thereafter. Several other escapes as close as this had occurred. A considerable number of southerners were still in Boston. It was said privately that what they wanted was "one from Boston" in order to show their discontented fellows at home that it could be done. Boston merchants were groaning over their loss of trade through the South's hatred because it had "not yet brought Boston under."

The Fugitive Slave Law not only caused numerous flights from the city; it led also to an influx of refugees from the border free states, where they had been living in anti-slavery and negro neighborhoods. During February, 1851, the number arriving within the knowledge of the vigilance committee equaled that of those given by Mr. Phillips as having fled, but the committee supposed that many more had come, and would continue to arrive in considerable numbers. As these people were destitute of almost everything, the committee appealed to the public for annual subscriptions and donations. Quantities of clothing came in and a considerable amount of money. The finance sub-committee supplemented the appeal of the general committee by sending a brief circular to all the religious societies of the state asking for a collection and got in return about \$1,500. Charles Sumner stated that the total number of fugitives who migrated to the North from the border free states on account of the new

Fugitive Slave Law was not less than six thousand. Most of these promptly entered Canada by way of Lake Erie and the Detroit and Niagara rivers, or through Vermont or Lake Champlain to St. Johns, Montreal, and other places in the province of Quebec. Some left Boston and neighboring ports on steamboats for the Maritime Provinces. Early in October, 1850, the fugitives still in Boston sent out a pathetic appeal to the clergy of the commonwealth in behalf of their terror-stricken fellows "now scattered through the various towns and villages of Massachusetts" and momentarily liable to seizure and return "to stripes, tortures and bondage." The clergy were urged to denounce the iniquitous Fugitive Slave Law and thus exalt the Christian religion and help break the rod of the oppressor.¹²

The vigilance committee engaged in many other activities. It encouraged other towns in the state to organize similar committees, and some few did so. It intervened to prevent the rendition of William and Ellen Craft by concealing them in Boston, transferring them to Marblehead, and sending them to Portland, Maine, and finally to England. It had thwarted in every possible way the agents of Robert Collins of Macon, Georgia, the owner of the Crafts, who had come to Boston to seize the slaves and take them back. On the basis of newspaper clippings he had received, Collins declared that his agents had been "arrested under various warrants as kidnapers and on other frivolous pretensions," and that they had been required to give unreasonable bail, his friends having become their sureties for more than twenty thousand dollars. Collins wrote to President Fillmore detailing these matters and complaining that "in many cases the officers had not performed their duty and warrants now lie dead in the marshal's office."¹³

Beside resorting to such methods, the committee issued

¹² Boston Public Library: Scrap-Book of Mrs. L. D. Parker: A circular, "The Fugitive Slaves' Appeal."

¹³ *Publications*, Buffalo Historical Society, XI, 301.

placards and hand-bills warning the citizens of the presence of slave-hunters, of whom descriptions and names were given. It planned the unsuccessful rescue of Anthony Burns from the court-house; provided for the defence of persons accused of participating in actual or attempted rescues; hired those who served as counsel in such cases and in fugitive slave cases; paid numerous negro citizens for boarding and lodging refugees; supplied the railroad or carriage fares for the timid ones who removed to inland towns and through tickets for some going to Canada; and in some cases provided steamboat passage to St. John, New Brunswick, Halifax, or England. The committee even reimbursed two men who had been imprisoned in other states and paid for an artificial leg for a fugitive whose foot had been crushed in his escape.

The committee's underground traffic from early October, 1850, down to the war totaled more than three hundred passengers of both sexes and all ages, the number varying greatly from year to year. Sixty-nine in 1851 was the largest number and nine in 1858 the smallest. But there were certainly many other fugitives sheltered and forwarded by Boston abolitionists and negroes who were never brought to the attention of the committee. After the rendition of Anthony Burns in 1854 the operations of the underground railroad throughout Massachusetts went on unimpeded. By the committee's cash-book, kept by Treasurer Francis Jackson, it appears that the total collections turned in from Boston and other towns of the state from October 20, 1850, to January 1, 1861, and applied to its general work, amounted to \$6,545.37; while the contributions from May 19 to November 18, 1851, for fugitive slave cases alone totaled \$1,420.32. Thus the grand total of receipts in money was \$7,965.69.

From Boston as a centre various underground routes radiated through the surrounding region. One of these passed through Natick, Sudbury, and Fitchburg. At Natick "Squire" Edward Walcott was an operator. In 1853 he built himself a mansion just south of the Boston and Albany Rail-

road with a brick tunnel extending to the railroad embankment from the cellar under the servants' kitchen. There seems to have been no other use for this tunnel than as a means of entrance for the fugitives shipped by rail from Boston. These persons were often seen by the Walcott children at meals in the servants' kitchen. From Natick these fugitives were conveyed to the home of Israel How Brown near the cemetery at Sudbury. Mr. Brown was a man of long experience in underground methods and had a market-wagon with high sides and a false bottom, beneath which he stowed his passengers on a bed of straw. He filled the space above with his produce and was ready for his long drive to Fitchburg by three o'clock in the morning. Once he was detained by officers of the law, but they were not shrewd enough to make him unload and therefore made no discoveries. Altogether Mr. Brown transported more than one hundred slaves.¹⁴

The secret route from Boston to Concord also connected with Fitchburg.¹⁵ Another one ran out through Medford and Woburn, thence northeast to Reading, where it was joined by a short branch from Medford by way of Stoneham. From Reading the line passed through Andover, Frye Village, now Shawsheen of the American Woollen Company, South Lawrence, and across the New Hampshire boundary to Salem, North Salem, and onward. Only a short distance from the bridge out of South Lawrence over the Merrimac, and near the falls, there still stands the large, two-story brick house of Daniel Saunders, the founder of the city of Lawrence, whose home was an important underground station. There the negroes arrived in the early morning hours, were fed and hidden in the cellar, and taken at night over the river and into New Hampshire. From Woburn, and probably also from

¹⁴ Natick *Herald*, March, 1930; Wellesley *Townsmen*, March, 1930; letter from Percival W. Jones of Sudbury, July 27, 1935; letters from Mrs. J. D. Macewen of Natick, August 10 and 16, 1935.

¹⁵ Fitchburg *Daily Sentinel*, October 31, 1888; *New England Magazine* (May, 1890), 282.

Concord, there was a route to the Merrimac at Lowell which avoided that cotton-mill city by turning northeast to the negro settlement known as "Black North" (Dracut), whence the wayfarers were helped on to Pelham and Windham in New Hampshire.

The most notable friend of the escaping slave in the Andover neighborhood was the Reverend Ralph Emerson, who lived in a beautiful colonial wooden dwelling which still stands on Andover Hill. For twenty-four years he was a professor in the theological seminary and during the last eleven years of that period its president. From Frye Village, three miles north, and also from William Jenkins's farm southeast of Andover, branch lines led northeast to Haverhill. This place also received numerous passengers over a route out of Boston through Saugus, South Danvers (now Peabody), and Georgetown.¹⁶

Finally, we must mention the shore line from Boston up through Lynn, Salem, Marblehead, Beverly, Ipswich, Newburyport, and Amesbury into New Hampshire. From Amesbury there was a branch across to Haverhill. In the autumn of 1834 there was considerable excitement in Salem, where a slave family had just arrived from Boston. Mary Whittier tells in a letter written at the time that Nathan Breed received them into his house, and that next day a reward of six hundred dollars was offered for them in a Boston newspaper; that Mr. Breed probably hid them in the country, thereby keeping them out of the hands of the slave-hunter, but would reveal nothing.¹⁷ On the little peninsula east of Salem stands Marblehead, where from 1840 to 1860 Mr. and Mrs. Simeon Dodge protected "a very large number" of refugees in their home, which had a secret trap-door for their escape in case of an attempted search. Dr. Samuel Young also kept a station in Marblehead. Some of the vessels putting

¹⁶ Boston *Evening Transcript*, May 16, 1896; Letter from Miss Marion LaMere, November 25, 1934.

¹⁷ This letter is in the possession of the Essex Institute at Salem, Massachusetts.

in at these ports brought stowaways direct from the South. At Beverly Dr. Ingalls Kittredge, a graduate of Harvard in 1820, who lived on the corner of Federal and Cabot Streets, shared his house and purse with the unfortunates.¹⁸

There were energetic underground agents at Ipswich, but their names have not been preserved. They conducted their passengers to the south end of the Parker River bridge and left them to be called for by Richard Plumer of Newburyport. He came for them at night in his spring wagon, which contained a few bags of grain. If the road through town was clear, he delivered them to Mr. Jackman at the north end of Newburyport, or drove across the old chain bridge over the Merrimac into Amesbury and handed them over to John Greenleaf Whittier or some other agent there. All the Quakers of Amesbury aided fugitives as opportunity offered. Sometimes Mr. Plumer's course lay out along the river road to Turkey Hill at West Newbury, where a Quaker farmer, Robert Brown, cared for the slaves, some of whom came to him from Danvers. He forwarded them to the Sawyer family, who were relatives of his at North Weare, New Hampshire, nearly forty miles to the northwest. One time, on his way to West Newbury, Mr. Plumer was pursued so closely that he stopped at Mr. Brown's corn field and told his fugitives to fly for their lives. In a moment they were lost to sight among the rows of standing corn. In case people were still abroad when Mr. Plumer drove into Newburyport with his load of negroes, he took them to his house, which still stands at 63 Federal Street, and concealed them under hay in the cellar or in two great ovens in the barn to remain until some night when the way was clear. Mr. Plumer was a dry-goods merchant for forty years and in later life held various public offices.¹⁹

¹⁸ Letters from Simeon Dodge, March, 1893, and January 29, 1894.

¹⁹ Letter from Mrs. John T. Dunnick (granddaughter of Richard Plumer), March 12, 1935; letter from Frank L. Jones of the Newburyport Public Library, April 14, 1935; *Historical Collections*, The Essex Institute, LI: Sidney Perley, *Plumer Genealogy*, 325; *Newburyport Herald*, January 24, 1881.

At various times runaway slaves were seen in the barn of Moses Huntington at Pond Hills, Amesbury. Just across the Amesbury line, at the top of Saunders' (now Tucker's) Hill on the Merrimac side, lived Deacon Moses Hoyt, who maintained underground connections with his relative, Daniel C. Hoyt. The latter's house stood at the junction of the hill and Savoy Road in Nicholsville, which is now a part of Haverhill. One time Daniel had five or six fugitives at his place and approached them with a stranger, when they scurried into the woods. He soon coaxed them back with the food he had for them, after which he started them out for the next station. Several times the poet Whittier brought runaways to Daniel's house. David P. Harmon of Haverhill was another of Whittier's friends who harbored slaves.²⁰

Beside the extensive underground system in eastern Massachusetts, there was a much more limited one in the western part of the state. The great thoroughfare of the latter was the Connecticut River valley, with tributary routes extending from Greenwich and New Haven up to Farmington, whither a short branch brought those refugees who had reached Hartford by boat. From Farmington they all continued their journey by way of Avon and Bloomfield to Springfield, Massachusetts. There a dozen or more men, some of prominence, managed the traffic. One of the most zealous workers in Springfield was Jeremy Werringer, the proprietor of the United States Hotel, which stood on the corner of State and Main Streets and was widely known for its hospitality and excellent table. The presence of negro servants afforded protection to the wayfarers. The cook hid some of them under the kitchen stairs, but the favorite place of concealment was the long spacious bin in the granary. Mr. Werringer's niece and adopted daughter has said that her Uncle Jerry packed off many a slave "as merchandise."

By the early 1840's fugitives were continually arriving in

²⁰ Manuscript read by Miss Susan L. Brown, daughter of Robert Brown, before the Whittier Society, in Amesbury, Massachusetts.

Springfield by the wagon-load and were distributed in Worthington Grove among the abolitionists. By 1847 this method came to be considered too hazardous, and a house was taken in the woods at Brightwood, on the north side of the town, as headquarters for them. Not all were kept there, for Werringer's hotel still remained a busy station, and while John Brown lived in Springfield (1849-1851) he reserved a room in his house for the seekers of freedom. He also organized some forty of the local negroes into a band of armed "Gileadites" to protect them from slave-hunters.²¹

From West Springfield some of the fugitives followed the Westfield River to the town of Westfield, where there were at least three coverts for them. Thence a branch passed north through Southampton, Westhampton, Northampton, Whately, Deerfield, and Greenfield to Brattleboro, Vermont, traversing the length of that state to Canada. The Westfield route continued to Huntington, then north to Cummington, whence two spurs entered Berkshire County. Midway between the Westfield-Cummington route and the Westfield-Brattleboro route was one through Goshen and Ashfield to East Charlemont, whither underground travellers came from Greenfield on their way to Brattleboro.

Springfield, being on the east side of the Connecticut, maintained a route on that side through Amherst and Montague and so up the river. According to Dr. E. Benjamin Andrews, one-time president of Brown University, the traffic over this line lasted from 1830 to the Civil War. His father, Erastus Andrews, was a station-keeper in Montague while serving as pastor of a church in North Sunderland and found no occasion for secrecy in his operations.²² There can be no

²¹ Mason Arnold Green, *History of Springfield, Massachusetts, 1636-1886* (Springfield, 1888), 470-471 and 506.

²² Letter from Mrs. Sarah B. Herrick (niece and adopted daughter of the Werringers), March 3, 1896; letter from William Rice, January 7, 1914; *Springfield Weekly Republican*, February 6, 1907; *Springfield Homestead*, February 6, 1907; O. G. Villard, *John Brown: A Biography Fifty Years After* (Boston and New York, 1910), 49-50.

doubt that the first Vermont destination of the fugitives travelling by this route was Brattleboro.

During the three decades before the Civil War hundreds of runaway slaves found succor in the towns of Massachusetts. Some never left the state, but for those who did various routes were maintained through New Hampshire and Vermont to Canada; while passage by water was provided for the few score who took refuge in the Maritime Provinces and in England.