

Researching and Interpreting the Underground Railroad

Ohio Local History Alliance Annual Meeting & Conference
October 6, 2017



NATIONAL
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
NETWORK TO FREEDOM

How to Become A Member

- Have a site, program, or facility with a verifiable association with the UGRR
- Complete Application Process
 - Applications due January 15 and July 15
 - Must have consent of owner, manager, or director
 - Consult with your Regional Manager throughout the application process.
 - Applications should “Speak for themselves”

Application and Instructions are available at: www.nps.gov/ugrr

Benefits of Listing a Site, Program, or Facility in the Network to Freedom

- National recognition
- Verifies that there is a documented association with the UGRR
- Encourages and supports local preservation efforts
- NTF Grants
- Access to technical assistance
- Promotes tourism and economic development
- National Park Service Passport Program

Type(s) of UGRR Association(s)

- Legal challenge to the Fugitive Slave Act and/or other laws punishing fleeing slaves and those who helped them
- Rescue of captured runaway from authorities or slave catchers.
- Associated with a person who actively harbored, assisted, or legally defended freedom seekers.
- Location of enslavement (residence or work) from which runaways escaped.
- Landscape used by freedom seekers in their escape (river crossing, cave, swamp, port, etc.)
- Location where freedom seekers were either sheltered, rested, or settled.
- Location where person was imprisoned or held after being captured for their participation in Underground Railroad.
- Location where person is kidnapped and forced into slavery. (Reverse Underground Railroad)
- Site where person associated with Underground Railroad activity is buried.
- Church with active congregation.
- Commemorative site

The UGRR Railroad: A Definition

■ “Resistance to enslavement through escape and flight.”

1847 Runaway Slave Advertisement
(St. Louis)

Courtesy: Library of Congress, Rare
Book & Special Collections Division,
African-American Odyssey

\$200 Reward.

RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of Thursday, the 30th of September,

FIVE NEGRO SLAVES,

To-wit: one Negro man, his wife, and three children.

The man is a black negro, full height, very erect, his face a little thin. He is about forty years of age, and calls himself *Washington Reed*, and is known by the name of Washington. He is probably well dressed, possibly takes with him an ivory headed cane, and is of good address. Several of his teeth are gone.

Mary, his wife, is about thirty years of age, a bright mulatto woman, and quite stout and strong.

The oldest of the children is a boy, of the name of FIELDING, twelve years of age, a dark mulatto, with heavy eyelids. He probably wore a new cloth cap.

MATILDA, the second child, is a girl, six years of age, rather a dark mulatto, but a bright and smart looking child.

MALCOLM, the youngest, is a boy, four years old, a lighter mulatto than the last, and about equally as bright. He probably also wore a cloth cap. If examined, he will be found to have a swelling at the navel.

Washington and Mary have lived at or near St. Louis, with the subscriber, for about 15 years.

It is supposed that they are making their way to Chicago, and that a white man accompanies them, that they will travel chiefly at night, and most probably in a covered wagon.

A reward of \$150 will be paid for their apprehension, so that I can get them, if taken within one hundred miles of St. Louis, and \$200 if taken beyond that, and secured so that I can get them, and other reasonable additional charges, if delivered to the subscriber, or to THOMAS ALLEN, Esq., at St. Louis, Mo. The above negroes, for the last few years, have been in possession of Thomas Allen, Esq., of St. Louis.

WM. RUSSELL.

ST. LOUIS, Oct. 1, 1847.

Running Away

\$200 Reward.

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WM. RUSSELL.

ST. LOUIS, Oct. 1, 1847.

\$150 REWARD.

RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of Monday the 11th July, a negro man named

TOM,

about 30 years of age, 5 feet 6 or 7 inches high; of dark color; heavy in the chest; several of his jaw teeth out; and upon his body are several old marks of the whip, one of them straight down the back. He took with him a quantity of clothing, and several hats.

A reward of \$150 will be paid for his apprehension and security, if taken out of the State of Kentucky \$100 if taken in any county bordering on the Ohio river; \$50 if taken in any of the interior counties except Fayette; or \$20 if taken in the latter county.

July 12-84-tf

B. L. BOSTON.

\$50.00 REWARD.

Ran away from the subscriber on the 6th inst., negro man Albert, aged about 40 years, black, and about 5 feet 9 or 10 inches high. His left hand has been very much injured from the chop of an axe across it. He wears whiskers. He had on when left home, an old pair of pantaloons of a brown color, an old full cloth coat, and an old hat, though probably he may shift his clothing consisting of a new jeans frock coat, and pantaloons a reddish brown, and other pairs of full cloth pants. It is believed he will make towards Washington city as he was taken from there once before.

I will pay the above reward if taken in any adjoining county to Rappahannock, and the same or the legal fee if it be more if taken in Washington city and secured so that I can get him again.

My Post Office is Flint Hill, Rappahannock County, Virginia.

EASTHAM JORDAN.

March 6th, 1861.

\$50 REWARD.

RANAWAY from the Subscriber, on Saturday night, the 23rd ultimo, a negro man named EDMUND BAYLIE, about thirty-five years old, five feet eight or nine inches high, not very corpulent, has a very great redness in one of his eyes, occasioned by a burn, has a down look when spoken to, talks but little. Has a large supply of clothing. The above servant is the property of Mrs. Nancy Neal. The above reward will be given if he is secured so that I can get him again.



THOS. J. MARLOW.

Living near Lovettsville, Loudoun Co., Va.
August 13, 1842-3t

100 DOLLARS REWARD!

Ranaway from the subscriber on the 27th of July, my Black Woman, named

EMILY,

Seventeen years of age, well grown, black color, has a whining voice. She took with her one dark calico and one blue and white dress, a red corded gingham bonnet, a white striped shawl and slippers. I will pay the above reward if taken near the Ohio river on the Kentucky side, or **THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS**, if taken in the State of Ohio, and delivered to me near Lewisburg, Mason County, Ky.

THO'S. H. WILLIAMS.

August 4, 1853.

\$100 REWARD—Runaway, the mulatto boy **BEN COLEMAN**, or **BROWN**, aged about 22 years, five feet two or three inches high, is of light complexion and well set—has been in the habit of making permits to go up and down the river, unmolested, but the wilding is not free—has no beard, and looks like a Mexican. The above reward will be paid if taken out of the State, and Fifty Dollars if taken in the State.

sep21-4w

G. BOULIGNY, 45 Dauphine st,

30 Dollars Reward.



ABSCONDED from the subscriber's plantation on the Wateree River, the first of August last, a Virginia born Negroe man, named Louis or Luey, about 25 years of age, 5 feet 3 or 4 inches high, and well set. He was seen a few days after, near Manchester. The above reward with all reasonable expences will be paid to whoever will deliver him at the said plantation or any goal in S. Carolina, N. Carolina, or Virginia.

W. CLARKSON.

Sept. 24th 1810.

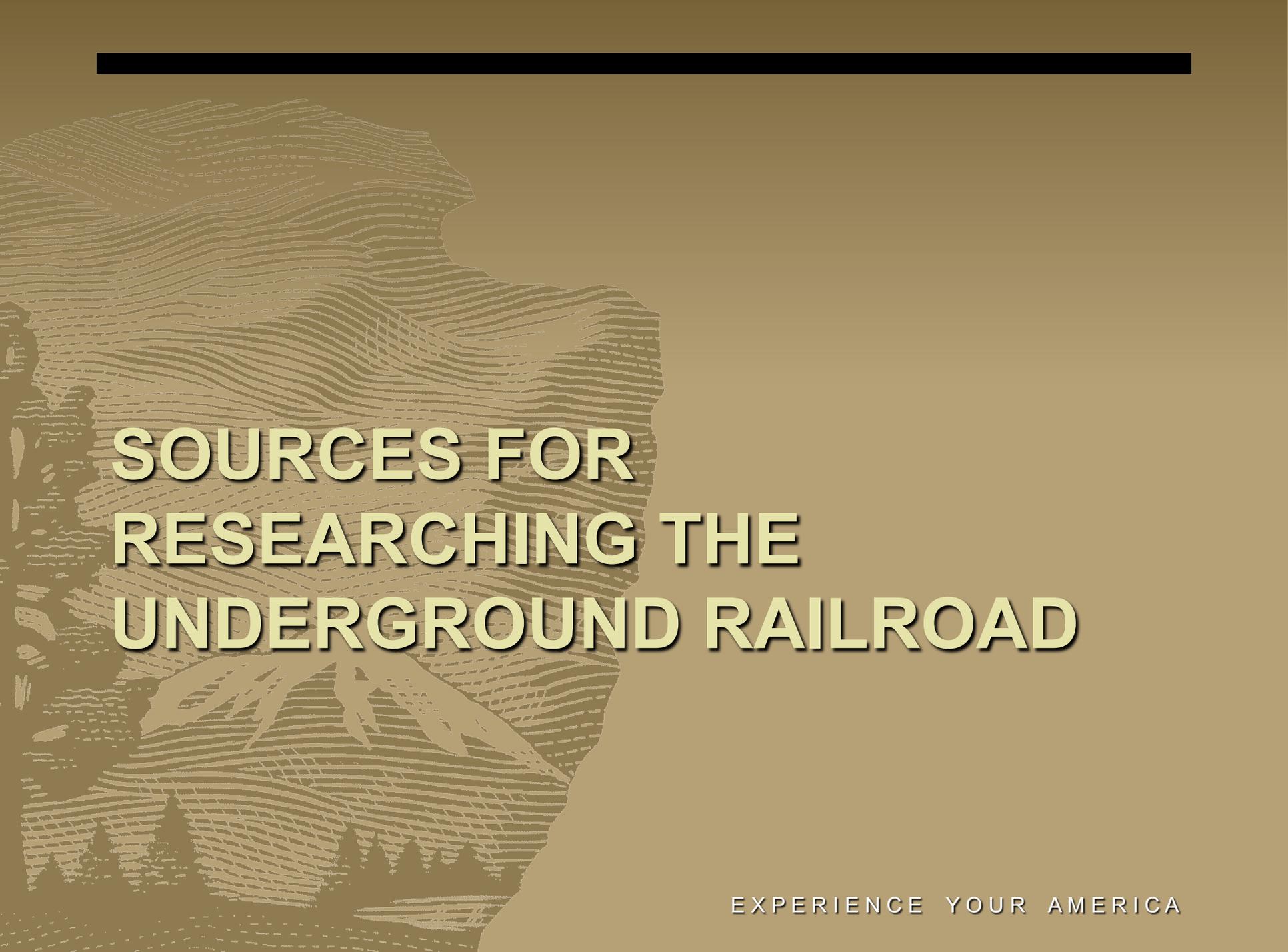
41 3w.

What Constitutes UGRR Activism

- People who ran away, resisting enslavement.
- People who availed their homes and businesses as places where freedom seekers could find refuge (often a place to rest and eat).
- People who helped transport freedom seekers.
- People who donated money or goods.
- People who provided medical care.
- People who represented freedom seekers or those who assisted freedom seekers in fugitive slave cases.

Underground Railroad?

- Which one of the following would not be considered Underground Railroad?
 - A) A ladies sewing circle that made clothing for freedom seekers.
 - B) A doctor who treated a freedom seeker who arrived to his town ill.
 - C) A plantation owner who freed his slaves and purchased land for them to establish a settlement in Ohio.
 - D) An escaped slave from Kentucky who upon reaching the free state of Ohio was captured by slave catchers and sold further south to New Orleans.



SOURCES FOR RESEARCHING THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Secrecy and the Underground Railroad?

CINCINNATI, June 4, 1848.

DEAR DOUGLASS:—I send you my last epistle from this city for the present. Since I last wrote you, I have held several meetings, all of which, like the preceding, were full of interest, by the presence of numerous anxious listeners—the ladies, as usual, forming the largest part of the assembly.

I have also been to Ripley, 50 miles above Cincinnati, in Brown county, where I held one meeting in the church of the famous Dr. John Rankin, long and favorably known to the friends of humanity in this country as a firm friend of the panting fugitive. His house has been made the resting place for the way-worn and weary for years, to the great chagrin of the slaveocrats of his neighborhood, and the slaveholders of Kentucky.—One friend informs me, and it certainly appears like an over-estimate, that he has known as many as forty to be there at a time! “packed away” in the underground depot.—This depot, as a matter of course, is not in the house of Dr. Rankin, but situated in a cavern about two miles south, of the whereabouts of which none but abolitionists are aware. This accounts for the great mistake on the part of the soul-seekers, who frequently, or at least have at different times, by brute force, entered the house of this aged gentleman, when they knew him to be unprotected—his eldest son being absent, and none but children and females at home—in search of their victims, but without success. ’Twas well it was the house of Rev. John Rankin they dared enter, and not some I wot of—yea, very well!

The North Star (Rochester, NY), 16 June 1848.

FUGITIVE AID SOCIETY.—The following named persons were elected officers for the ensuing year, of the Fugitive Aid Society at the meeting on the 28 h inst.: President, James T. Alston; Vice President, M. Gregory; Treasurer, Joseph Williams; Secretary, B. S. Green.

One of the chief objects of this Society is to guard the public against impositors. All persons applying for assistance as fugitives should be directed to the President or Treasurer of the Society, who will pay due attention to their case.

B. S. GREEN, Secretary.

Cleveland Morning Leader, 31 August 1861.

KENTUCKY SLAVE STAMPEDE.—We learn from the Lexington (Ky.) Atlas, of Saturday last, that Patrick Doyle, charged with being concerned in emancipating slaves to runaway, had a hearing before an examining court, on the previous day. A number of witnesses were examined, and although no positive testimony was elicited against him, his guilt was made sufficiently manifest to justify the court in sending him on for further trial before the Fayette Circuit Court. Bail to the amount of \$20,000 was required, which the prisoner was not able to give, and was committed to jail.

The Sun (Baltimore, MD), 23 August 1848.

Primary vs. Secondary Sources

■ Primary Resources

- Accounts by participants, direct witnesses, or first recorders of events.
- Created close to the time of the event the account describes.

■ Secondary Resources

- Accounts by persons not present at the time of the event.
- Created after the time period in which the event occurred.

Primary Sources

- Family papers
- Autobiographies, Memoirs, Reminiscences and Slave Narratives
- Contemporary Newspapers and Periodicals
- Diaries and Journals
- Letters
- Organizational Records (i.e. church, vigilance committee)
- Plantation Records
- Runaway Advertisements
- Slave Lists, Bills of Sale
- Government Records (i.e. court records, military records, census records, Freedman's Bureau, Southern Claims Commission Records)
- Property Records
- City Directories
- Interviews
- Maps
- Oral Histories

Runaway Advertisements

\$200 REWARD!

 **RANAWAY** from the subscriber, living in Fayette county, 7 miles from Lexington on the Maysville Turnpike, sometime in May last; a Negro Woman named **CELIA**. She is about 28 or 30 years of age, heavy, stout made, of copper complexion, and is quick-spoken.

I purchased said woman of **GEORGE WARE**, dec'd, and she may be in the neighborhood of her former owner's, or of Clintonville, Bourbon county.

I will give a reward of \$100, if taken any where in the State of Kentucky, or \$200, if taken out of the State, and delivered at **L. C. ROBARDS'** jail in Lexington.

M. H. PARKER.

Fayette county, nov 17 59

"Runaway Slave Advertisement," The Underground Railroad in the Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana Borderland, <https://urrrborderland.omeka.net/items/show/12>.

Information Provided in Slave Advertisements

- Name
- Physical Description
- Personality
- Specialized Skills or Talents
- Items they took with them
- Information about Slave Owner
- Personal History
 - Former Slave Owner
 - Previous Residences
 - Previous Escapes
- Escape Details
 - Place they Escaped from
 - Means of Escape
 - Items they took with them
 - Possible Destination(s)

Secondary Sources

- Non-Contemporary Newspapers
- Local/County/State Histories
 - County Atlases
 - Biographical Histories and Sketches
- Biographies
- Publications by Historical and Genealogical Societies
 - Magazines
 - Journal
 - Newsletters
- Scholarly Articles and Books, Theses and Dissertations
- Oral Histories

Locating Sources

- Historical and Genealogical Societies
 - Ohio History Connection (Columbus, OH)
 - Western Reserve Historical Society (Cleveland, OH)
- Archives
 - Oberlin College Archives (Oberlin, OH)
- Libraries
 - Hudson Library and Historical Society (Hudson, OH)
 - Smith Library of Regional History (Oxford, OH)
 - Union Township Library (Ripley, OH) Archives
- Clerk of the Courts Offices
- County Recorder Offices

Locating Sources (cont.)

- Internet
 - Doc South (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill)
<http://docsouth.unc.edu/>
 - Ohio Memory
 - Siebert Collection
 - Ohio History Connection Selections
 - GoogleBooks
 - Library of Congress, Chronicling America
 - Genealogical Databases
 - Ancestry.com
 - Familysearch.com (census, burial, marriage, death)
 - Fold3 (census, military records, and city directories)
- Private Collections

Siebert Collection



Wilbur H. Siebert
(1866-1961)

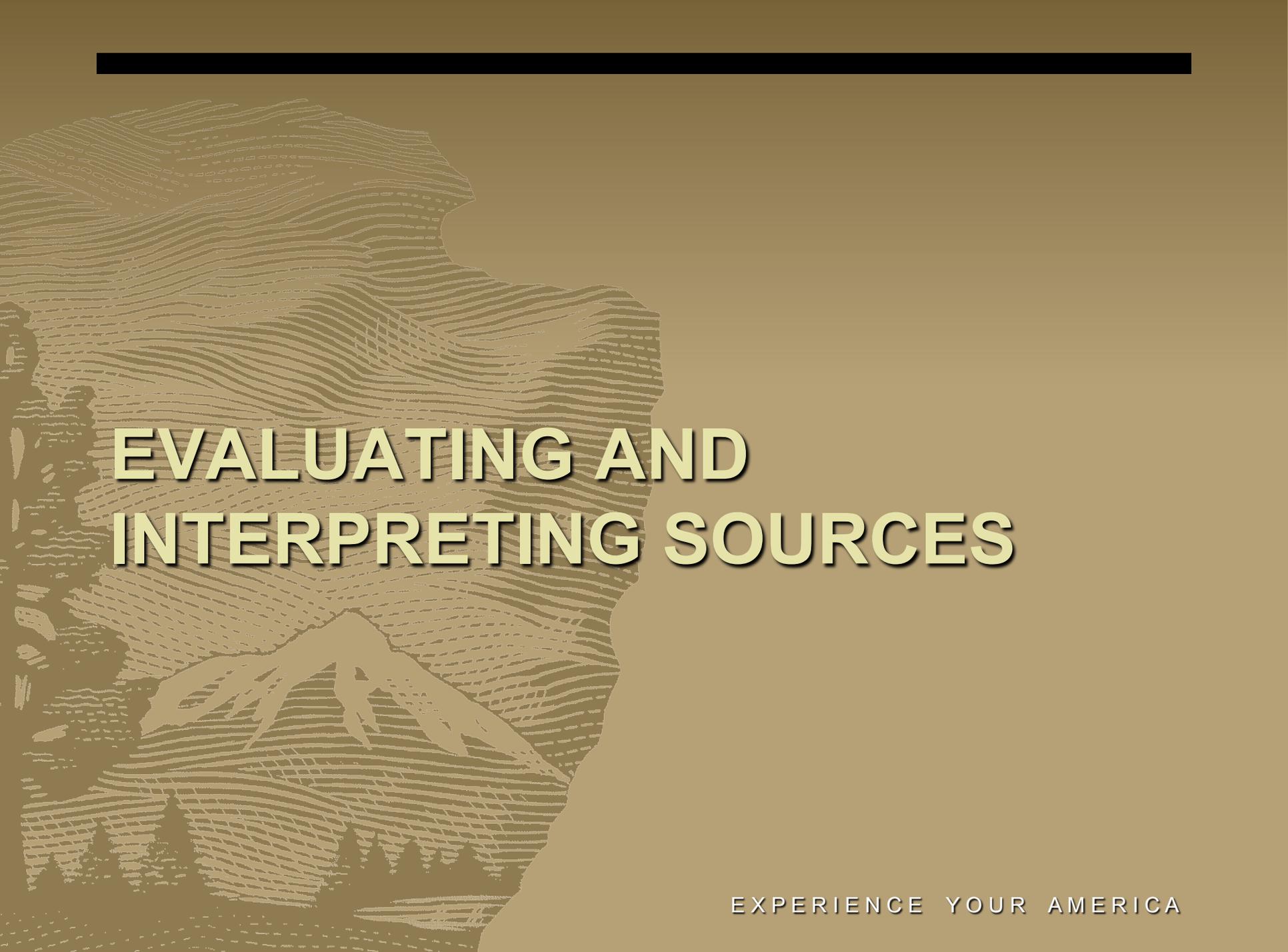
There was a Quaker settlement about North Lewisburg, or West Liberty, in Logan Co., (or both) and so connected the Wanger (or zer) neighborhood with Marysville.

Our habit was for Aaron Skinner and I to go on foot with our fugitives out to John Cratty's. I went with a wagon only three or four times. Aaron Skinner usually went with a team.

John Cratty's house was on the road leading from Marysville to Delaware, six miles east of here. Cratty usually took the fugitive to his brother, Robert Cratty, about four miles further, and he would take them on through Delaware to a Quaker neighborhood in the eastern edge of Delaware Co.

I have also taken them down to a colored man—a large fine-looking African—who lived in the Dublin woods, where was a darky settlement three miles southeast of Dublin (between Dublin and Plain City). Washington was the darky's name. He had been a slave. He would take charge of them and transfer them to some other station.

Interview with Samuel A. Cherry of Marysville [Ohio, Union County], 10 November 1894.



EVALUATING AND INTERPRETING SOURCES

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

Evaluating a Source

- When was it created?
 - Time elapsed between the event and the time it was recorded.
- Who created it?
 - Directly Involved
 - Related to a family or friend of an individual who was directly involved
 - Public Memory

Evaluating a Source (cont.)

- Why was it created?
 - Purpose
 - Intended Audience
- Can its details be corroborated?
 - Compare Sources

Oral History

Credi

- Refers to the involvement of particular individuals, specific event or place.
- Source of the story is someone with direct connection to UGRR, either participated in the events themselves or personally knew someone who was involved.
- Details provided can be corroborated.

Bad

- Focuses on hidey places.
- Recorded long after events occurred.
- Source of account cannot be traced.
- Source is traced back to someone without direct connection to UGRR events.
- None of the provided details can be corroborated.

Direct vs. Indirect Evidence

- Direct Evidence
 - States outright that something occurred.
 - Provides direct proof that does not require any inference.
 - Provided by someone who directly observed or experienced an event.
- Indirect (Circumstantial) Evidence
 - Provides indirect evidence. Implies rather than states outright.
 - Evidence that allows one to make a reasonable inference based on other facts that have been proven.

Underground Railroad?

- Which of the following would be considered circumstantial evidence?
 - A) A report of a court case where a man was put on trial for violating the Fugitive Slave Law.
 - B) A woman believed to be involved in Underground Railroad activities is listed as a member of a church that was known to be anti-slavery and have connections to the Underground Railroad.
 - C) A diary where a man talks about his involvement in the rescue of enslaved man.
 - D) A newspaper story recounts the story of a woman visits a jail and trades clothes with a woman who was being held under suspicion of being a fugitive slave, allowing her to escape.

Evaluating the Credibility of Sources

- Highly Credible
 - Direct first-person/eye-witness account.
 - Contemporary account.
- Probably Credible
 - Evidence of organizational, business, religious, or family associations that connect to Underground Railroad.
 - First person/eyewitness account dated after the time of the Underground Railroad.
- Questionable
 - Evidence of organizational, business, religious, family, political associations that connect to anti-slavery.
 - Third-person account dated after the time the after the time of the Underground Railroad by someone who was personally acquainted with the person involved (i.e., fellow church member, business partner, etc.).
- Not at all Credible
 - Source of information is unknown.
 - Corroborating evidence is lacking.

Underground Railroad?

- Order the following from least credible to most credible.
 - A) A court summons, dated 1848, summoning a known abolitionist to appear before the court on the charge of violating the fugitive slave law.
 - B) A newspaper article from the 1920s by a local historian discussing the use of a complex tunnel system used for the Underground Railroad.
 - C) An autobiography published in 1869 by a freedom seeker who escaped on the Underground Railroad during the Civil War.
 - D) A local history, dated 1880, based on interviews with participants that detail a secret fraternal organization that directed Underground Railroad activities in the area.

Underground Railroad?

- Local tradition holds that a house with a secret room was a stop on the Underground Railroad. Research uncovers that the house was not built until 1880.
 - A) The story is highly credible.
 - B) The story is probably credible.
 - C) The story is questionable.
 - D) The story is not at all credible.

Follow-Up

While the actual house located on the property was not involved in the Underground, the person who inhabited the house or the property where the house was built could be associated with the Underground Railroad.

- Look to see if the owner of the house had connections to anti-slavery and the Underground Railroad prior to residing in the 1880s house.
- Look to see if there was another house located on the property prior to the 1880 house that dates to the period of the Underground Railroad.
- If there was another house previously located on the property, check to see who owned/lived in the house.
 - Property Deeds
 - Census Records
 - City Directories
- Did the person who owned/lived in the previous house have connections to anti-slavery or Underground Railroad activities?

Underground Railroad?

- A member of a church with a well-known abolitionist preacher is believed to have been involved with the Underground Railroad. Research shows that the member migrated from New England and according to meeting minutes was a member of a vigilance committee.
 - A) The story is highly credible.
 - B) The story is probably credible.
 - C) The story is questionable.
 - D) The story is not at all credible.

Follow-Up

- Besides mentioning the member belonged to the vigilance committee, what else do the meeting minutes indicate about his Underground Railroad activities? How else might his involvement be further corroborated in other sources?
- Look where the member came from in New England to see if there is any record of anti-slavery or Underground Railroad activity there.
- Look to see if there is evidence of other church members participation in the Underground Railroad. How is the member in question connected to other members of the church that are documented participants?

Underground Railroad?

- Local tradition holds that the inhabitant of a house was an Underground Railroad operative. However, according to an 1830 census, the inhabitant of the house owned slaves before moving to Ohio from Kentucky.
 - A) The story is highly credible.
 - B) The story is probably credible.
 - C) The story is questionable.
 - D) The story is not at all credible.

Follow-Up

Being a former slave owner does not preclude one from participating in the Underground Railroad.

- Is there a specific UGRR incident he was involved with?
- Look to see if the former slave owner freed or sold his slaves prior to moving to Ohio.
- Look to see if belonged to anti-slavery organizations prior to moving to Ohio.
- Where did the person settle in Ohio? Strong anti-slavery presence in the place? On Underground Railroad route?
- Look at organizations was associated with in Ohio.
 - Anti-slavery church?
 - Anti-slavery societies?
- Who were his associates? Do they have ties to the UGRR?

Underground Railroad?

- According to county history, a respected African American citizen who arrived in the county in 1858 had escaped from slavery. According to an 1860 census, the alleged freedom seeker was born in 1838 in New York.
 - A) The story is highly credible.
 - B) The story is probably credible.
 - C) The story is questionable.
 - D) The story is not at all credible.

Follow-Up

It was not unusual for freedom seekers to say they were born in the north when supplying information for a census taken prior to the end of the Civil War.

- Find out more information about the life of the freedom seeker.
 - Try and determine if the freedom seeker was actually born in New York.
 - Check the 1850, 1870, and 1880 census.
 - Look for birth, marriage, and death records.
 - Look for an obituary for the freedom seeker. Does it talk about where the freedom seeker came from? Does it indicate that the freedom seeker escaped from slavery?
 - Did the freedom seeker write a slave narrative either before or after the Civil War?
 - Was the freedom seeker ever interviewed?
 - Are there reminiscences/interviews with others alive at the time who were personally acquainted with the freedom seeker that contain information about his background?

Underground Railroad?

- A county history recognizes a Presbyterian minister's involvement in the UGRR discussing how a reward for his capture was offered by southern states. However, you find a newspaper article from 1890 in which the minister says that he was not an abolitionist.
 - A) The story is highly credible.
 - B) The story is probably credible.
 - C) The story is questionable.
 - D) The story is not at all credible.

Follow-Up

Sometimes people who were involved in Underground Railroad activities would claim not have been an abolitionist after the Civil War.

- Look to see if can find the actual reward advertisement or contemporary newspaper article talking about the offer of a reward for the minister's capture.
- Look to see if there are any contemporary records which indicate that the minister was involved in Underground Railroad activities.
 - Newspaper articles
 - Court Cases
- Look for evidence that the minister was involved in organizations connected to anti-slavery and/or Underground Railroad activities.
- Look to see if reminiscences/interviews by other known Underground Railroad operatives or people alive at the time mention the minister's participation.

Researching the Underground Railroad

- Conduct a reasonably exhaustive search for all information that will help to document the UGRR story.
- Completely and accurately cite every source of information discovered.
- Analyze and correlate the collected information to assess its quality as evidence.
- Resolve any conflicts caused by contradictory information uncovered during research.
- Create a coherent written narrative of UGRR based on uncovered information.
- Continue researching.



If you have any questions:

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