

Iowa and the Underground Railroad

Iowa played an important role in antislavery and Underground Railroad activity



It's still surprising to many Iowans to learn that the state's earliest settlers played an important role in antislavery and Underground Railroad efforts in the years leading up to the Civil War.

Though slaves were escaping and being helped to freedom from the early days of slavery in the United States, the phenomena known as the Underground Railroad lasted from about 1830 to 1861. Neither underground or an actual railroad, the term alluded to a loose network of sympathetic individuals and groups that were willing to risk life and liberty to help these fugitive slaves as they headed for the free states of the North and Canada.

Antislavery and underground railroad participants who operated north-of-the-border states knew Iowa as their westernmost free-state link. The risks of this already dangerous activity of helping

escapees increased on September 18, 1850 when the United States Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. It required the United States government to aid in returning escaped slaves and punish those who hindered it. Nevertheless, a number of Iowa's earliest settlers, often motivated by religious convictions and a marked appreciation of the principles of individual rights and personal liberty, provided shelter, transport, and material support for the travelers on this trail to freedom.

The State Historical Society of Iowa conducted historical research and fieldwork through the Iowa Freedom Trail Project. This project sought to document Underground Railroad activities throughout Iowa by identifying individuals and groups who were involved with these activities and the places where these events occurred in Iowa.

The project continues to uncover new information, sometimes obtained from local sources and descendants of individuals involved in Underground Railroad activities.

Iowa Anti-Slavery Timeline (1839-1854)

1839: "An Act to Regulate Blacks and Mulattoes"

Passed by first territorial legislature of Iowa. The Law required Negroes and Mulattoes to obtain from a court a certificate stating they were free. The person had to post a five hundred dollar bond as guarantee of their good behavior. A fine of five to one hundred dollars could be charged to anyone who hired or harbored a Negro or mulatto who had failed to obtain a certificate or post the required bond. Slaveholders could pass through Iowa with their slaves and fugitive slaves were to be arrested and returned.

1840: Blacks and Mulattoes Forbidden to Marry Whites

This was enacted by the Iowa territorial legislature. Local anti-slavery societies and Liberty parties tended to subordinate questions of Negro rights to issues on slavery.

Early 1843: Local Petitions Seek Repeal of 1839 Act to Regulate Blacks and Mulattoes

When Quakers in Salem (Henry County) Iowa considered hiring Negro mechanics for work in their village, a petition to the legislature requested repeal of the 1839 law concerning hiring or harboring blacks. Another petition from Washington County residents asked for repeal of the entire law. Neither was reported out of the Judiciary committee to which they were referred.

Summer 1843: First Liberty Party Ticket in Iowa Appears in Henry County

1844: Constitution of 1844 Prohibits Slavery but Restricts Negro Rights

The final draft allowed Negroes to settle in Iowa, but denied them rights of suffrage, militia service, or ability to hold legislative office.

April 1846: Constitutional Convention Ignores Questions of Negro Rights

The resulting constitution, which served Iowa from 1846 to 1857, imposed restrictions on blacks and mulattoes similar to what had been in the constitution of 1844, essentially carrying the Black Laws over into the statehood period.

November 1846: Annual Anti-Slavery Meeting Calls for Liberty Party to be Organized

At annual anti-slavery society meeting, delegates called for a state Liberty party to be formed in early 1847 and sent several petitions to the legislature during the winter of 1846-1847.

November 1847: Alanson St. Clair, Anti-Slavery Agitator, Comes to Iowa

Iowa anti-slavery men hired St. Clair as a lecturer in the fall of 1847 after he had recently organized abolitionist activity in Illinois. Residing in Fort Madison, he became editor of a new abolitionist paper, The Iowa Freeman, which eventually became a Free Soil paper and moved to Mount Pleasant.

December 14-15, 1847: Liberty Convention Organizes State Party at Yellow Springs

In Des Moines County, under chairmanship of Eli Jessup, a Quaker from Salem, committees of the new party were formed along with creation of a state central committee and recommendation for a Liberty newspaper to be established.

May 24, 1848: First State Convention of Liberty Party

The first state convention of the Liberty Party met at Salem (Henry County), Iowa and put forth complete tickets for state and national offices then at stake. This action was spurred by near silence of the major parties on slavery and was reinforced by failure of the Whig State Convention on May 11th to take a strong stand against slavery.

Fall 1848: The Freeman, First Established as a Liberty Party Newspaper, Became the Sole Free Soil Party Paper for Iowa

February 8, 1850: Southeast Iowa Free Soilers Unwilling to Unite with Whigs

Free Soilers in southeastern Iowa (Des Moines, Henry, and Lee Counties) met in convention and declared their unwillingness to unite with the Whigs, which they concluded had abandoned anti-slavery principles.

May 8, 1850: Free Soil State Convention in Iowa City (Johnson County), Iowa

The Free Soil State Convention met one week before the Whig state convention to select a list of candidates. Delegates hoped Whigs would respond with measures to attract Free Soil vote such as a strong anti-slavery platform or support for Free Soil candidates. Whigs ignored the overtures.

June 21, 1850: A second Free Soil Convention at Salem (Henry County), Iowa

Selected Dr. George Shedd as candidate for 1st District Congress

October 30, 1851: Free Soil Convention at Yellow Springs (Lee County), Iowa

With George Shedd as president, delegates resolved that "slavery and freedom cannot long exist together" under the new Fugitive Slave Act.

November 1851: Anti-Slavery Men Resolve to Petition Legislatures Against Fugitive Slave Act

Meeting in Van Buren County, persons attended resolved to send petitions to state and national legislatures asking for repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act

Winter 1850-1851: Free Soilers Hold Non-Political Public Meetings Against Fugitive Slave Act

Seeing decline in opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act, Free Soilers organized non-political meetings to protest the law. Three in Danville (Lee County) on December 27th, 1850, January 16 and January

24, 1851 went against the anti-slavery men. They found supporters of the Fugitive Slave Act had packed the meetings and easily outnumbered anti-slavery opponents in resolutions voted upon.

February 1851: Exclusion Law Passed by State

The state legislature prohibited Negro immigration into Iowa. Those already here could remain, but any subsequent migrants to Iowa were to depart within three days and were subject to a fine of two dollars a day and imprisonment if they remained in Iowa. Twelve years later, in a test case, a district court judge ruled that the law was a violation of both the state and national constitutions and was therefore not binding. One year later the legislature repealed it.

April 1851: Associated Presbytery of Iowa Call for Abolition of Slavery

Meeting in Crawfordsville, Iowa, the church body called for "unconditional and immediate abolition of slavery," with members actions toward the fugitive slave act to "obey God rather than man and abide the consequences."

June 1851: General Association of Congregational Churches Affirms Being Guided by Higher Law Than Man-made Law Toward Slavery

Meeting in Denmark, Iowa, members declare that a higher law than man-made law should guide their acts and that members do nothing to aid in apprehending fugitive slaves.

June 25, 1851: Free Soilers in Six Southeastern Counties Hold Mass Meeting

In Washington, Iowa, anti-slavery delegates adopt 28 resolutions, half of which are against the new fugitive law, slavery's existence, and extension of slavery into the territories. Other mass gatherings took place on July 4th at Columbus City and Salem.

July 1851: William Dove, of African Methodist Episcopal Church in Muscatine, Attends Anti-Slavery Convention in Chicago

The minister represented Iowa at a Northwestern Christian Anti-Slavery Convention.

August 1851: Free Soilers Send Four Delegates to National Convention

The delegation included Samuel Luke Howe of Mt. Pleasant, Asa Turner of Denmark, Joseph Whithan of Quasqueton, and D. P. Nichols of Charleston.

December 1853: Senator Augustus C. Dodge of Iowa Introduces Another Bill to Organize Nebraska Territory

This time Dodge extends boundaries on the north to 43°30', which was the latitude of Iowa's northern boundary. Referred to Senate Committee on Territories

January 4, 1854: Senate Committee on Territories, Headed by Stephen Douglas of Illinois, Reports Out Substitute for Dodge's Measure

Among changes is a stipulation that "all questions pertaining to slavery in the Territories, and in the new States to be formed therefrom, are to be left to the decision of the people residing therein, through their appropriate representatives." This amounts to abandonment of Missouri Compromise of 1820 prohibiting slavery in Louisiana Purchase north of 36°30'.

January 23, 1854: Senator Douglas Introduces Second Substitute Bill Specifically Ending Non-Slavery Provision of 1820 Missouri Compromise in Louisiana Territory

The bill specifically declared that Section Eight of the Missouri Compromise had been "superseded" by principles of the Compromise of 1850 and was therefore "inoperative." It also would create two territories, Kansas and Nebraska, out of the Nebraska country.

February 22 1854: Whig State Convention Platform Disapproves Congressional Efforts to Allow Slavery into Nebraska Territory

The second resolution spoke of the "binding force" of the Missouri Compromise as a "final settlement," while a third resolution "emphatically disapprove of the efforts. . . being made in Congress to legislate slavery into the Territory of Nebraska."

March 28, 1854: Slavery Attacked in "To the People of Iowa" Address Authored by James W. Grimes, Whig Candidate for Governor

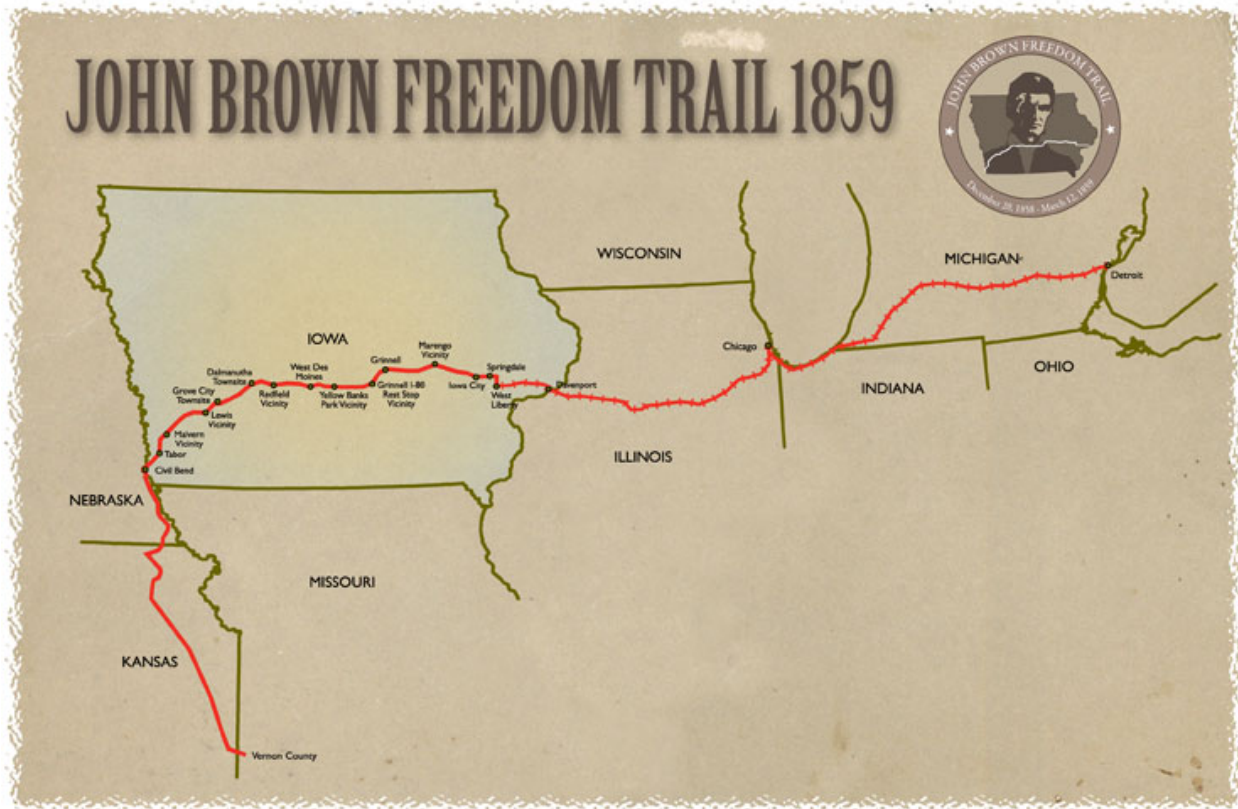
The address was read before Free Soil 2nd state convention at Crawfordsville, which endorsed his candidacy.

In the longest section of the address, Grimes attacked the "infamous attempt to nationalize slavery" and of how Iowa would not tolerate slavery in Nebraska territory. The address quickly became a campaign issue after Whig newspapers published it in early April.

May 30, 1854: Kansas-Nebraska Act Signed Into Law

Issue dominates ensuing campaign in Iowa and surprising Democratic losses result from narrow margin of victories.

John Brown Freedom Trail 1859



After conducting a raid into Missouri on December 20, 1858, John Brown, with twelve men, women, and children freed from slavery, plus ten of his own men (including three Iowans), crossed into Iowa on February 4, 1859 to begin a fateful final journey across Iowa during February and March.

Brown was no stranger to the territory, having traveled in Iowa many times before. This time was different, with some Iowa residents taking a dim view of his recent exploit. In spite of this, supportive sympathizers aided the party as it proceeded.

Ten months later Brown was dead, having been captured and hung after the former Kansas fighter and his band attacked the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia on October 16, 1859. The rash action ignited great controversy and became a catalyst leading to Civil War.

Brown's Action as Part of Kansas Troubles

The Kansas-Nebraska struggle arose after 1854 over whether the territories would become slave or free states. This made western Iowa an important staging area for free-state forces and also an area of operations for those engaged in aiding fugitives escape enslavement.

The northward flight of persons from enslavement in western Missouri often brought them first to a rural Iowa hamlet known as Civil Bend, just upriver from Nebraska City. From there they would be directed to Tabor and then eastward across Iowa toward Chicago and Canada.

For Iowa residents this participation was a dangerous and illegal business. Many avoided involvement in the slavery issue and wanted to keep black settlement out of the state, while others saw the state standing forth as a beacon of anti-slavery hope.

The outward flow of runaway slaves spread tension in Missouri and other border slave states while the larger Kansas conflict enraged both North and South, killed the Whig Party, made the Republican Party, split the Democratic Party and guaranteed Lincoln's election.

John Brown's Final Trip Across Iowa (1859)

Stop #1: Blanchard House

Historic Marker at Blanchard Cemetery



On February 4, 1859, abolitionist John Brown and a group of escaped slaves crossed the Missouri River at Nebraska City and made their way to the former settlement of Civil Bend in Fremont County.

At Civil Bend, the group stayed at the home of Dr. Ira Blanchard (pictured). The Blanchard House was a stop on the Underground Railroad and Brown often found shelter there during his trips to and from Kansas helping escaped slaves to freedom.

He and his group took refuge there for the night, after laying low in southeast Kansas for several days. Brown's final journey across Iowa had begun.

Today, the only physical reminder of this stop on the Underground Railroad are historic markers and the Blanchard Cemetery, which stood adjacent to the Blanchard Home.

Stop #2: John Brown's Campground at Tabor

Historic Marker at Tabor Anti-Slavery Historic District

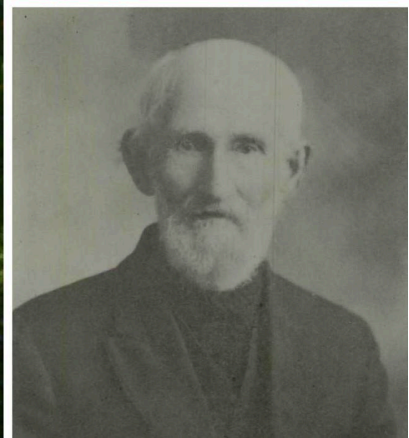
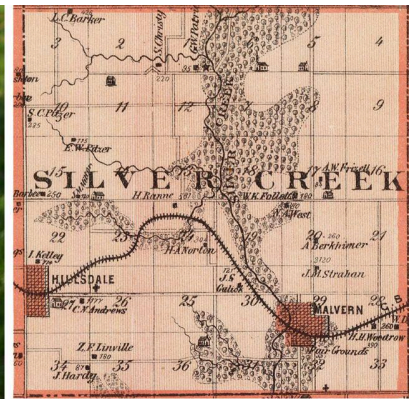
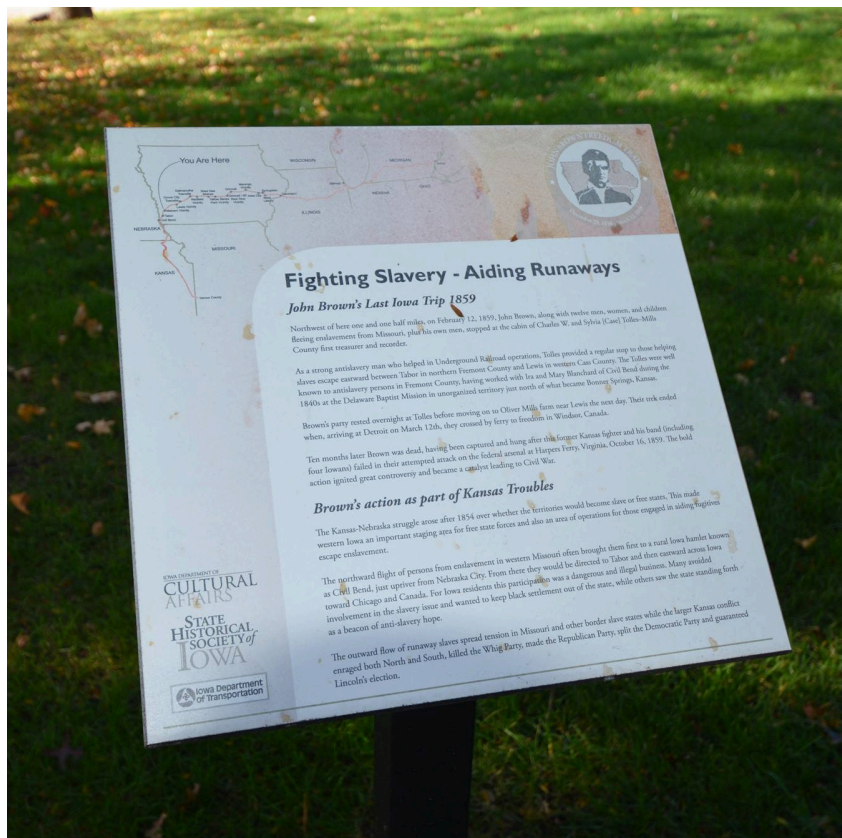


After overnighting at the Blanchard House in Civil Bend, John Brown and his group traveled to Tabor, Iowa – arriving on February 5, 1859. Tabor was an anti-slavery stronghold and a stop on the Underground Railroad. It was known as a staging area for Kansas-bound Free Soil settlers and the Reverend John Todd House (pictured) was used as a place to store arms and provisions during the Bleeding Kansas conflict.

Brown had spent a good deal of time in Tabor prior to 1859. This time, Brown received a cool welcome when he arrived in Tabor. Local residents were displeased with Brown and his recent actions. He had gone beyond his regular actions of assisting freedom seekers and had begun to actively free slaves and kill slave owners. Because of this cold reception, the Brown entourage only stayed at Tabor a week.

Stop #3: Charles Tolles Cabin

Historic Marker at Wortman Cabin in Paddock Park, Malvern



After spending a week in Tabor, Iowa, on February 12, 1859, the John Brown party travelled to the Charles and Sylvia Tolles Cabin, in rural Mills County, 1.5 miles northwest of present day Malvern, Iowa.

Tolles (pictured) was born in February 1823 and sought adventure on the western frontier. Tolles arrived in Mills County, Iowa, in 1846 and became active in the Underground Railroad due to his previous association with Ira Blanchard.

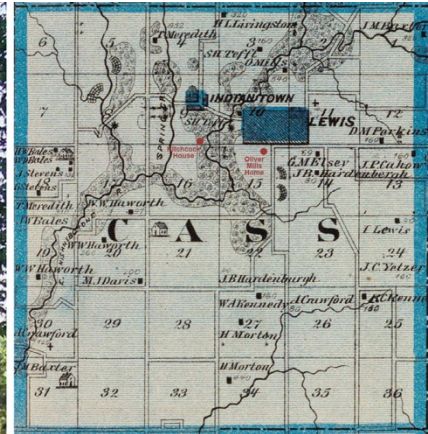
The three wagon caravan left early the next morning, February 13, and headed northeasterly towards Lewis, Iowa, in a bad snow storm.

Years later, Tolles recollected about Brown: "I did not see a savage but a determined countenance, an eye that looked straight down in to your very soul."

For more information about Charles Tolles' colorful life, check out this account published in the [Annals of Iowa in Spring 1925](#).

Stop #4: Oliver Mills Farm

Historic Marker at Hitchcock House



The John Brown entourage left the Tolles Cabin and headed northeast in to a snow storm on February 13, 1859. They travelled toward Lewis, Iowa, and the farm of Brown's cousin Oliver Mills (pictured).

Mills lived just south of Lewis, then the county seat of Cass County. Reverend George B. Hitchcock, a Congregationalist, resided about a mile due west of the Mills place (see map). Mills and Hitchcock worked together in the antislavery movement. The Hitchcock House (pictured) is a National Historic Landmark and one of the few physical reminders of the Underground Railroad remaining in the state.

Oliver Mills was born in Trumbull County, Ohio in 1821. At 29, he removed to Iowa and by 1857 he had settled near Lewis. After his involvement with the Underground Railroad, Mills continued to be active in civic life. He was elected to the Iowa General Assembly in 1872 and served twenty years with the state agricultural society. Notably, he promoted the establishment of the state agricultural college, now Iowa State University.

Stop #5: Grove City House

Historic Marker at Former Grove City Town Site



John Brown, with twelve men, women, and children escaping slavery from Missouri, plus ten of his own men, stopped near Grove City in Atlantic Township in Cass County on February 14, 1859. They stayed at the Grove City House, operated by David A. Barnett. Barnett, a large farm owner, local town promoter, and husband of Grove City's postmistress, worked with Oliver Mills and Rev. George Hitchcock of nearby Lewis to assist those escaping slavery. Brown's party rested overnight at Grove City on their three month trek toward freedom.

The then new, but now bygone, town of Grove City briefly boomed in hopes of becoming the county seat with the railroad's arrival. Unfortunately, the railroad tracks skirted the edge of Grove City and the train barreled by the settlement at full speed on the way to Atlantic, Iowa. Grove City, the size of a quarter-section of land and a 24 block town (see historic maps) dried up and is now denoted only by a historic marker.

Stop #6: Porter Hotel

Historic Marker at Former Dalmanutha Town Site



On February 15, 1859, the John Brown party stopped at Dalmanutha, a settlement on the Middle River. They stopped at the tavern hotel, operated by John Porter, a 49 year old farmer and hotel operator. At that time, Dalmanutha was still a hamlet, with only ten dwellings. The Brown entourage stayed only one night before continuing eastward.

Dalmanutha was laid out in 1855 in Thompson Township in southern Guthrie County. The Western Stage Company was operating stage coaches between Des Moines and Council Bluffs that stopped at Dalmanutha. The community supported a post office from 1863 to 1875. It is now a ghost town approximately five miles northwest of Casey, marked by only a few buildings, historic markers and the Dalmanutha Cemetery. Porter, the abolitionist, is buried at the western edge of the cemetery.

Stop #7: Jonathan M. Murray Farm

Historic Marker at Redfield Depot



On February 16, 1859 the John Brown entourage stopped near Redfield, Iowa, at the farm of Jonathan M. Murray. The three-wagon caravan traveled approximately 25 miles that day. They rested overnight at Murray's place before continuing on.

Murray, a fifty-five year old abolitionist from Maine, lived just over a mile east of the eventual town of Redfield on the road to Adel. Murray's grave is located at the Redfield Cemetery.

The Murray farm is private property. The Freedom Trail marker about the farm is located at the Redfield Depot.

Stop 8: James Jordan Residence

Historic Marker at James Jordan House



On February 17, 1859 John Brown's group, made up of 12 escaped slaves and Brown's 10 men (all heavily armed) arrived at the farm of James C. Jordan and rested overnight in the timber. The Jordan House was built in phases beginning in 1850. It is located in West Des Moines, and is now a museum.

Jordan was born a southerner, but turned against slavery as a young man in Virginia after helping chase down fleeing slaves from a neighboring plantation. In 1846, James Jordan migrated to Iowa and settled in Walnut Township, along with his wife and children. Jordan was a successful businessman, farmer and banker. He also served in the Iowa Legislature and led the charge to move Iowa's State Capitol from Iowa City to Des Moines. He platted Valley Junction and established a railhead there, later, in 1938, the community became West Des Moines.

James Jordan died in 1893 and is buried at the Jordan Cemetery.

Stop 9: Brian Hawley Farm

Historic Marker at Yellow Banks Park



After resting overnight the John Brown party continued eastward across Polk County. On February 18, 1859, the group arrived at Brian Hawley's farm, near present day Runnells. They stayed there one night before continuing the journey to freedom.

Hawley was a 49 year old saw mill owner and carpenter. He lived just west of Yellow Banks Park, a Polk County Conservation site.



Stop 10: Cornwall Dickinson Farm

Historic Marker at Interstate Highway 80 Eastbound Mile Post 181 Rest Area



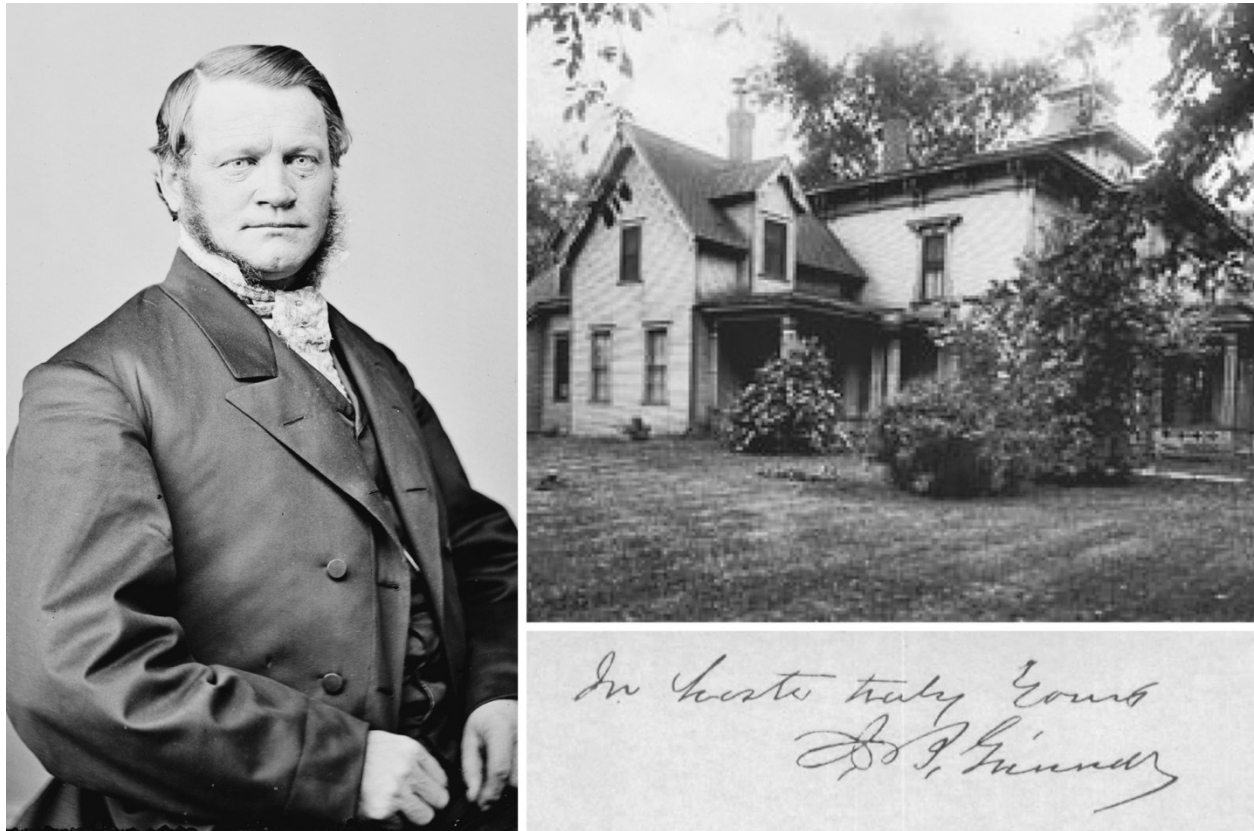
On February 19, 1859, John Brown's group stopped at the Cornwall Dickinson Farm on the far eastern edge of Jasper County (see map). The Dickinson Farm was located at the site of the Interstate Highway 80 Eastbound Mile Post 181 Rest Area.

With mild winter weather, John Brown and his entourage stayed only one night at the Dickinson's before continuing on to Grinnell.

Dickinson was a 45 year old farmer, originally from Ashtabula County, Ohio - an antislavery stronghold. He and his wife Rebecca had six children. Based on research at the State Historical Society of Iowa Research Center, we know that Dickinson purchased two parcels of land in Poweshiek County and moved his family there in 1864 (see map).

Stop 11: Josiah B. Grinnell House

Historic Marker at Grinnell Central Park

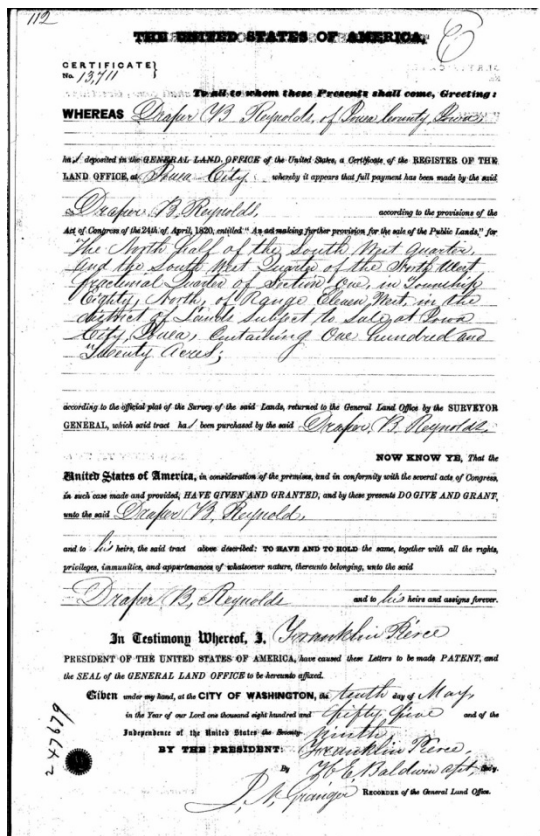


Favored by mild winter weather, John Brown & his crew continued east to Grinnell, Iowa, on February 20, 1859. They stayed two days, and Brown developed his plan to attack the US Arsenal at Harpers Ferry during his time with town founder Josiah B. Grinnell (see photo). Grinnell was a Vermont native, a Congregationalist minister and part of the strong anti-slavery movement in town. Grinnellians gave John Brown \$25 and provisions for several days.

Grinnell later served in the Iowa Senate and US House of Representatives (where he was physically assaulted by Congressman Lovell Rosseau for insulting his home state of Kentucky). He was a benefactor for Grinnell College and later become the Director of the Rock Island Railroad. Grinnell passed away in 1891 and is buried at Hazelwood Cemetery in Grinnell.

The Grinnell House (see photo) stood across from Grinnell Central Park until 1914, when it was moved. The home was demolished in 1984.

Stop 12: Draper B. Reynolds Farm Historic Marker at Marengo City Park



On February 20, 1859 John Brown's group, made up of 12 escaped slaves and Brown's 10 men overnighted at the Draper B. Reynolds Farm 1.5 miles south of Marengo, Iowa (see map).

By the time they arrived in Marengo, the Brown entourage had been travelling for nearly two months. After rescuing slaves in southwest Missouri, they moved north through Kansas and Nebraska and arrived in Iowa on February 4.

Draper, a Pennsylvania native, homesteaded south of Marengo in 1855 (see map). He was 49 years old when he sheltered Brown's entourage of abolitionists and freedom seekers. Draper passed away in 1875 at the age of 68 is buried at the Old Marengo Cemetery.

A marker in Marengo City Park is the closest publicly accessible place to where John Brown stayed at the Reynolds Farm.

Stop 13: Dr. Jesse Bowen Residence

Historic Marker at College Green Park



On February 24, 1859, John Brown and his crew of escaping slaves and abolitionists passed through Iowa City on their way to Springdale, Iowa. Iowa City was the westernmost point on the railroad and the community was hotly divided over slavery.

One night during his time in Springdale, Brown and a companion snuck in to Iowa City to meet local abolitionists Dr. Jesse Bowen and William Penn Clarke. Brown was seeking railroad car arrangements to move his group further east. Word got out about Brown being in town and soon others were on the lookout for this so-called anti-slavery "fanatic." Dr. Bowen harbored Brown at his house on 914 Iowa Avenue until, during early hours of the morning, Col. S. C. Trowbridge guided them out of town via back roads.

Dr. Jesse Bowen, a pioneer physician, early editor of a temperance newspaper and later a state senator, actively opposed slavery and befriended those who took direct action against it. He took delivery of revolvers from Massachusetts shipped to Brown in care of Jesse Bowen. In March 1859, Brown also entrusted Bowen with disposing of arms remaining in Tabor.

W. Penn Clarke, an active member of the Kansas national committee for Iowa, a prominent man in Republican party circles, and an energetic successful lawyer, applied his intensely partisan views to aiding men such as John Brown in Underground Railroad efforts.

Stop 14: William Maxon House

Historic Marker at Springdale Cemetery



After sneaking through Iowa City, the John Brown entourage arrived in Springdale on February 25, 1859. Springdale was a Quaker hamlet established in 1854 and Brown and his men had spent the previous winter there, staying with William Maxon and conducting military drill. This time, the group would stay in Springdale for two weeks before boarding trains to Chicago.

After Brown's raid in Missouri was published in newspapers a reward was offered for his capture. This concerned residents of Springdale and the posted sentries in case a mob from Iowa City might try to intercept him at Springdale.

Two men from Springdale, brothers Barclay and Edwin Coppoc, joined Brown's force. They continued with Brown until the failed raid on the US Federal Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Edwin was captured and hung after the attack, while Barclay escaped. He went on to serve as a Lieutenant in the US Army and died in a train crash over the Platte River in 1861.

A historic marker is located at Springdale Friends Cemetery, a nearby publicly accessible site near the location of the former Maxon home (see photo).

Stop 15: Keith's Mill and West Liberty Depot

Historic Marker at West Liberty Depot

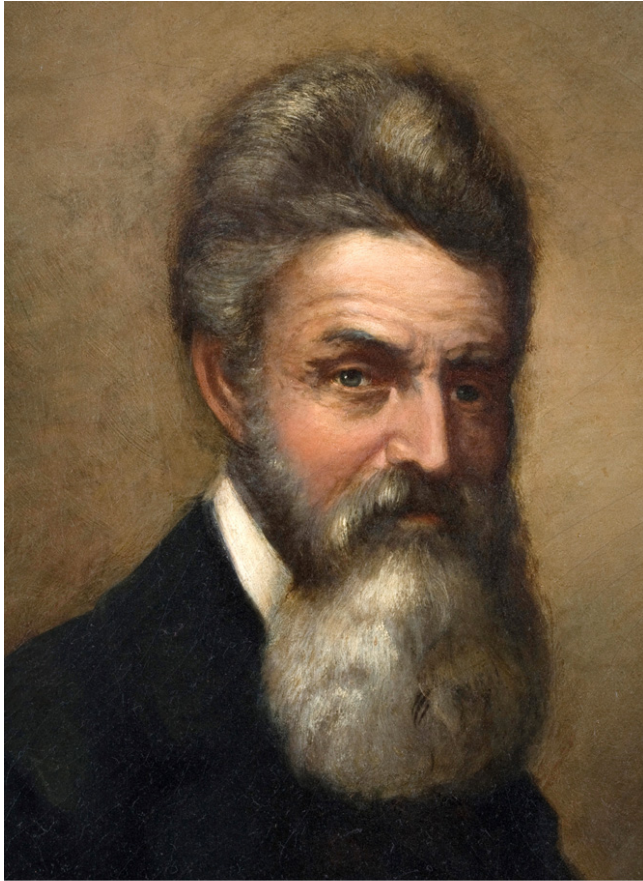


On the evening of March 9, 1859, John Brown, with twelve men, women, and children that had escaped slavery from three southwest Missouri farms, plus his own men, arrived in West Liberty. The party had spent the last two weeks at Springdale, awaiting rail transportation arrangements.

Upon arriving at their West Liberty rail connection, Brown's group stayed overnight at nearby Keith's Mill. An engineer operating the first morning's eastbound train from Iowa City dropped off an empty box-car near the mill. Soon—as friendly residents looked on—the liberated slaves boarded the boxcar. The train left West Liberty the next morning. It was bound for Chicago, with the boxcar placed between the engine and express car.

Stop 16: Davenport Railroad Bridge

Historic Marker at Sea Wall in Davenport



On the afternoon of March 10, 1859, John Brown (see photo) and his entourage passed through Davenport in the empty box car they had boarded that morning. They crossed a five year old railroad bridge (see photo) on a train bound for Chicago.

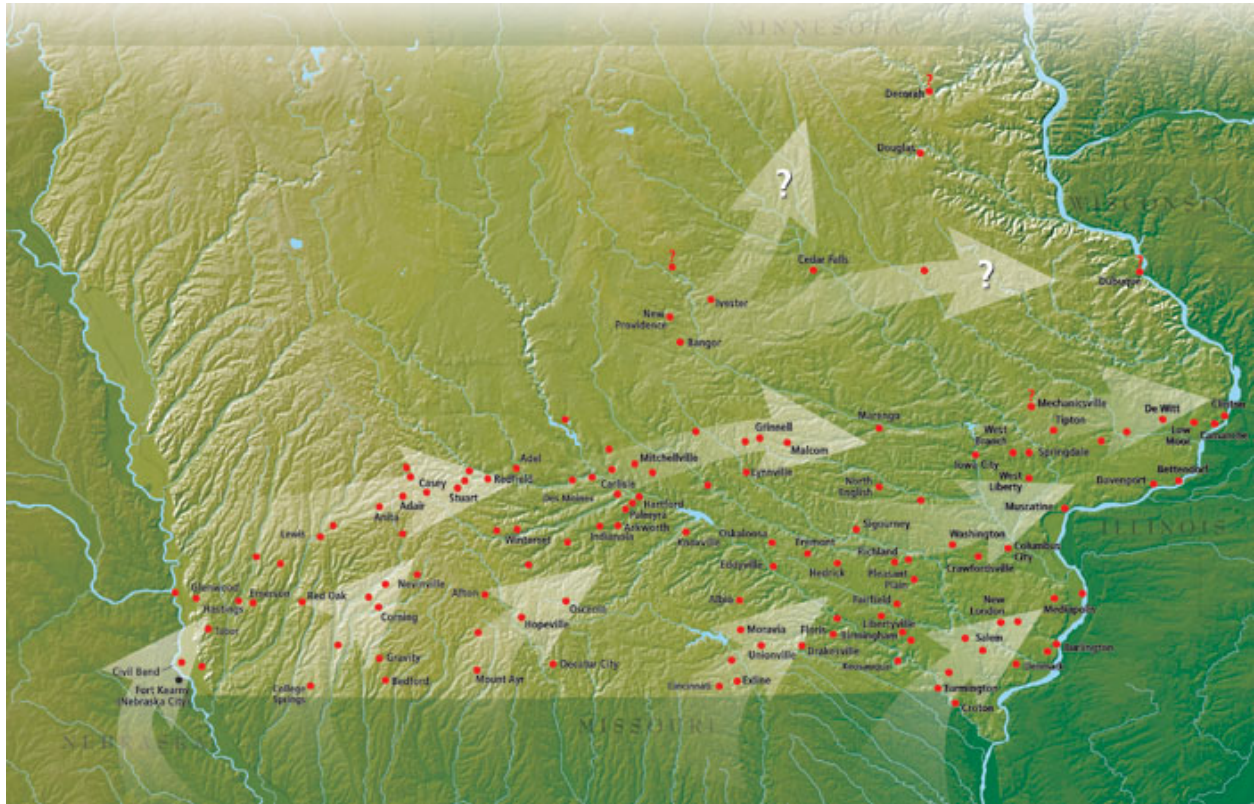
Crossing the Mississippi River at Davenport was the final stop on Brown's Iowa Freedom Trail. Within two days, the group would pass through Chicago and Detroit, where the escaped slaves would take a ferry to freedom in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Only seven months later, Brown and his men would attempt to seize the Federal Armory and Arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia). Nine months later, Brown would be dead - hung for treason.

A historic marker is located along the Sea Wall at Davenport and marks the end of the Iowa Freedom Trail.



Routes of the Freedom Seekers

One goal of the Iowa Freedom Trail Project was to document sites associated with anti-slavery and Underground Railroad activities in Iowa. Though many places have been identified, few standing structures remain.



The primitive roads and Indian trails throughout Iowa in the 1830s through the 1850s drew a human traffic of a unique kind. Fugitive slaves, on the run to freedom in northern states and Canada, crossed into Iowa from Missouri, Kansas and Nebraska. Some of these Freedom Seekers made the trip on their own without help while others negotiated the landscape with the aid of a network of sympathetic citizens. Since routes depended on circumstances, this map indicates the general entry points, and known and possible routes eastward, and probable exit points from the state for fugitive slaves. Some of the Freedom Seekers remained in Iowa or eventually came back to Iowa to live. Many of the Freedom Seekers continued their journey eastward to live in other states or to leave the country to live in Canada.

The places on the map indicate areas in Iowa where Underground Railroad activities occurred and have been documented to various degrees. Many of the people who were involved with giving aid to the fugitive slaves were abolitionists, people who believed slavery was wrong.

Existing Structures in Iowa

Todd House
Tabor, IA

George B. Hitchcock House
Lewis, IA

Henderson-Lewelling House
Salem, IA

James C. Jordan House
West Des Moines, IA