

ABOLITION IN EASTERN ASHTABULA COUNTY

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In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for Enriched Junior English
Conneaut High School
12 March 2004

PREFACE

Much has been written of the Hubbard family of Ashtabula, so much that many writers choose to overlook the rest of the county and replace it with only the name and locus. This is an unfortunate aspect because through this reasoning much history is lost. That is why it is the focus of this research paper to create a focus on the communities of Eastern Ashtabula County, Ohio.

For this paper we shall start in the South East corner of Ashtabula County at Williamsfield, proceed on to Lindenville, in much of the same fashion for the rest of the county. These communities lie on, or near present, State Routes' 7 and 193. In some cases I may venture out of this area to give an account of a story related to the topic.

INTRODUCTION

“Might as well try to get a saint out of heaven, than a slave out of Ashtabula County.” Though variations of this statement appear in print, it says much about the character of the people who occupied this section of the county. Many the people who settled this area of the Connecticut Western Reserve kept the sentiments of their New England ancestors and were fierce abolitionists.

When we think of abolitionists, our thoughts are almost immediately forwarded to the Underground Railroad, for short UGRR. These conductors are generally given the limelight in the history books because of their willingness to risk monetary fines or jail time for their beliefs. It should be, however, pointed out that abolition is a thought. From this thought came action. However, these actions did not always involve the harboring and aid of slaves.

WILLIAMSFIELD

The first town a slave might come to when they entered the Ashtabula County boundary was the village of Williamsfield. Williamsfield is the town in the South-East corner of Ashtabula County. It seems that the Morse family was one of the more active families in this area. The Rev. Elijah Morse, a native of Massachusetts, helped found one of the first Methodist class' here. Another Morse, Judah, established an early route for the Underground Railroad, utilizing the Old Salt Road, Rt. 7, as a direct route to Conneaut Harbor (Jack).

LINDENVILLE – WAYNE

Just south of the town of Wayne was the little “hamlet” of Lindenville. Near a ravine in the Southern portion of this settlement stood an old farm house belonging to Deacon Andrews. The good deacon was ever ready to receive a shipment of “grain” from friends Plumb and Sutcliffe. The deacon was so good at this trade, that his wife and kids were oblivious of the actual freight being handled (Johnson 95).

Charley Garlick, a noted escapee who made his residence in Jefferson, noted in his memoirs another conductor. He was Joseph B. Barber. He was a cattle dealer in trade, but was willing to risk his business and reputation to help those fleeing from the south. (4)

ANDOVER

Further north on State Route 7 is the community of Andover. Most of the activity in the Andover area was lead by one man, Rev. Charles Shipman. Shipman, originally from Gustavus,

Trumbull County, Ohio, established his route on the UGRR sometime near 1837 – 38, while a circuit preacher for the Universalist faith (Seibert 306). Known as Elder Shipman or Uncle Charley by his constituents, Shipman adopted the moniker “XXX” for his work as an agent, thus



**Rev. Charles
Shipman**

he was known as Thribble X. Shipman was one of the more ornery of the agents, and unlike most agents, would use violence if necessary to prevent an escapee from returning to bondage. A familiar story comes from Orwell native H.U. Johnson’s *From Dixie To Canada*. It was told that Shipman, enroute from Andover, armed himself and slave Jack Watson with heavy “walking sticks” in case bounty hunters overtook them. Shipman had hoped to avoid this situation, but a confrontation

occurred and the sticks were put to use. Two were injured and the others fled for their safety (77).

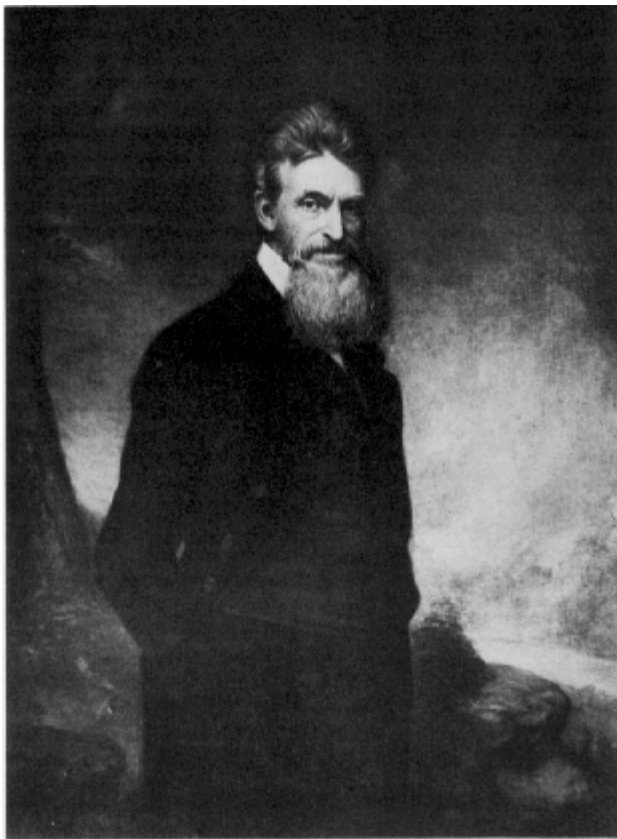
WEST ANDOVER

Located directly west of Andover on present day Route 6, was West Andover, a settlement in its own during times of heightened abolition. It was not uncommon for the devout of the ‘Higher Law’ of their God, to build a safehouse for fleeing slaves. Such was the case in West Andover. On land purchased by him in 1831, Leverett H. Osborne erected a house circa 1843 to aid those fleeing from the ‘peculiar institution.’ The building included a “captain’s lookout,” and under a section of removable floor boards was the secret compartment in which runaways were hidden. This space, only about three feet high, was large enough to hold approximately a dozen fugitives. This house was searched many a time by slave catchers to no avail. It was in the foresight of Mr. Osborn when he built the house to provide a second exit, in

case the hiding place was discovered. So a shaft was built, disguised as a chimney it lead to the basement,. This same house was purchased about 1856 by Dwight R. Carpenter, who continued its use as a station.

The next farm south on the old State Road was Deacon Jeheziel Carpenter, also an agent. It is unclear of what relation the two were, but in this case, abolition ran in the family (Bogue).

CHERRY VALLEY



John Brown

If ever a Northern location to start the Civil War, Cherry Valley would certainly be near the top of the list. While generally overlooked by historians, some residents of this town, west of Andover, played a part in the best known insurrection against slavery: the raid on the arsenal by John Brown and his men at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. It was through

Horace Lindsley, an avid abolitionist in his own, that

John Brown corresponded and planned the events of the raid with others involved. These men, who were scattered around the Southern portion of Ashtabula County, included: Dangerfield P.



HORACE LINDSLEY

Newby, Aaron V. Stevens, Edwin Coppic, Oliver Brown, Watson Brown, Albert Hazlett, Stuart Taylor, Charles P. Tidd, William and Adolph Thompson, John H. Kagy, Jeremiah Anderson, John E. Cook, and John Brown, Jr. (Lampson 37). He was not involved in the actual raid, but was very active in the planning. In the King Brother's Cabinet Shop was about "four wagon loads" of arms used to overtake Harper's Ferry. The majority of the arms had been shipped to Ashtabula by rail, and then received in Cherry Valley by sled. When shipped, the arms were sent in coffins. To account for their vast weight, were marked "fence castings." These arms were moved from time to time for security reasons. Before they left the county the arms were being stored at Wayne on the farm of Alex Fobes. It was Fobes and three others, Schuyler Noxon, Nathaniel Coleman, and M.F. Dean, who removed these arms to Hartstown, Pennsylvania on the night of July 22, 1859. There they were placed on the canal and shipped to the Kennedy farm near Chambersburg, Maryland (Lampson 25).

We all know how Brown and his men took the arsenal but failed in achieving any other of Brown's plans. While the majority of the men were killed or captured, five men, three of whom were at or near Harper's Ferry the night of the seizure, were able to escape to Ashtabula County to seek refuge. They were O.P. Anderson, Owen Brown, Barclay Coppic, Frances Merriam, and James Redpath, who later wrote a biography of John Brown (Lampson 31). Also in hiding was John Brown Jr., who was wanted in the planning of the raid.

From the political action taken to attempt to remove Brown, Jr. and the others from the county, a new society was formed. Known as the Independent Sons of Liberty, this group is better identified as the Blackstrings. This name comes from a black thread they used as identification, that was worn in their collar buttonhole (Williams 35). It was their objective to guard and protect any persons who sought refuge in the county from being forcefully removed to

testify in front of the committee trying John Brown and company. Using different signals to warn each other, the fugitives could be moved safely from place to place. One of these signals was a distortion of the word Ohio (Lampson 39). This activity was not limited to the Cherry Valley area, but was spread across most of the mid to Southern part of the county.

RICHMOND

Richmond township is directly north of Andover on State Route 7. Though Richmond was on a path leading north on the UGRR, no abolitionist would take up permanent residence here, due to the notorious Copperheads who occupied the area. Copperhead is a nick-name for any member of the Knights of the Golden Circle, an order which later evolved into the Klu Klux Klan (Fuller 6). The Knights were known to harass any persons known to aid the slaves. To them, abolitionists were “nigger thieves, fanatics,” or “incendiaries.” (Seibert 308) If this group was not enough, there were other groups formed in the Girard and Albion areas of Erie County, Pennsylvania (‘Copperheads’ n.p.). Another goal of the Copperheads was to catch the fugitive slave and return them to bondage to reap the financial rewards usually offered.

DORSET – DEMARK – PIERPONT

It is with some regret that these three towns must be grouped together. Specifics were not given in any materials found in the research process. With little doubt, many routes for the transportation of slaves crossed through these areas. It may be that these areas were thought to be high risk, because of the close parameter to Richmond. For the time being who remains unknown.

MONROE

Monroe is bordered on the North by Conneaut Township and to the east is the Pennsylvania stateline. If you followed State Route 7 into Monroe Township, near the present day intersection of Route 84, you would have run into a settlement then called Reed's Corners. Today we know this settlement as Bushnell. Our abolitionist is of that surname. Sidney S. Bushnell handled the contraband of slaves, moving ever closer to freedom in Canada.



Samuel Hayward

There were several places for an escapee to go in Monroe. If you selected a route other than Route 7, you could find yourself in Kelloggsville. Kelloggsville was home to Samuel Hayward. This area seemed to be particularly safe for slaves as Hayward would later tell of some slaves staying for a weekend (Clark 48). Hayward's name also appears in H.U. Johnson's tale of Edward Howard (142).

A little further north of Kelloggsville one might find safe heaven in the presence of Albert Kellogg. Being of New England ancestry, Kellogg was compelled to aid the negro by the same passion which ran through the blood of the good people of the upper Atlantic States.

SHEFFIELD

Rev. Rufus Clark wrote in his *Early Sketches of South Ridge* that Sheffield was used as a diversion to throw slave catchers off the trail. This route lead to the doors of J.R. or Stephen Gage (46).

KINGSVILLE

Kingsville, on the shores of Lake Erie, also seems to be used as a place of diversion. Ira Taft would receive the goods and transport them beyond the reach of the slave hunter (Clark 46). But Mr. Taft was not the only person known to harbor slaves. Under their penname, the poet Franziska authored “A Story of Slavery” for the Kingsville Tribune sometime around 1887. From among the verse of the stanzas comes the story of a fugitive slave beseeching the help of one of the residents of Kingsville, in this case the Hon. D.C. Phelps. Phelps readily invites the slave into his home and is given meal and shelter for the night. On the morning, Phelps was approached by a neighbor who told Phelps of the knowledge of the neighbors on his harboring a slave in his quarters. Also attained was the information that one of the individuals, in their greed, set off to get the marshall so that he might search Phelp’s residence, discover the slave, and collect reward. Phelps immediately warned the slave of forthcoming problem and lead the slave out the back and concealed the runaway in a thicket near Lake Erie. He told the escapee that when all was well, he would return and direct him onto Canada. On his return to his premises, Phelps was met with a party in possession of a legal document granting the searching of the residence. The laborious search was fruitless, much to the disappointment of the bounty hunter.

CONNEAUT TOWNSHIP

SOUTH RIDGE

Don’t look for the community of South Ridge on the map today, you will only find the road. South Ridge now bears the name of Farnham. As many small country towns, most life has left and only few people remain and with those people dies the memories of days past.

One man was almost wholly responsible for the conversion of the early supporters of slavery to abolition. Ralph Wright received the knick-name “Abolitionist Missionary” for his work. Wright would receive pamphlets of information on abolition and slavery, and being vision impaired would ask people on the street to read his papers to him. From this Uncle Ralph was able to memorize this information and preach it to whoever would listen. The reader and listener went away with a new awareness on the “peculiar institution.” Mr. Wright never lived to see the day the slaves would be free. He died in 1860 and is buried among the other early settlers of the Ridge in the South Ridge Cemetery (Clark 43).

During the earlier half of the 19th century, South Ridge rivaled Conneaut for population. It was here that some of the most pious people, devoted strictly to Higher Law, resided. The people committed themselves to spread the word of abolition and refused to live among any who were pro-slavery.



South Ridge Free Will Baptist Church

Much abolitionist sentiment was preached to the people in church. Consecutive preachers of the South Ridge Free Will Baptist Church made it a point to give sermon to the congregation on the evils of slavery. It was in this church in October of 1839 that the General Conference of Free Baptists met, the first

out of the New England states. During this meeting the members of the Baptist church took a strong stance against slavery. It was understood that this was the most supreme action taken against slavery by any Christian group in the United States at that time (Clark 44).



Rev. Rufus Clark Gould brothers in Springfield Township (Clark 44).

One man who would stand behind that pulpit was the Rev. Rufus Clark, to whom we are indebted for his sketches on South Ridge. Clark would hide the runaways at his house, directly north of the church. This house also served as the church parsonage (Seibert 308). From Clark the slaves were usually directed

into Erie County by way of the



Parsonage

The only anti-slavery society which is ever known to have existed in Conneaut's limits convened on the evening of October 23, 1839 at the Baptist Church. It was on the 14th night previous after a lecture by Rev. D.M.L. Rollin that the people of South Ridge saw it necessary to form such a society. On that 23rd night the preamble and constitution, written by a committee consisting of Diocletian Wright, Rev. Rollin, Rev. Gardiner Dean, Alonzo Moulton, and Silas A. Davis, was formally adopted. "The meetings held it's meetings at such times and places as the officers seemed proper" (Clark 44). At one of its last regular meetings, April 21, 1845, the president was asked to select delegates to represent the Ridgeville people at the Ashtabula County Liberty Convention to be held at Jefferson (Clark 45).

One of the men selected to represent South Ridge was Marshall W. Wright. In his later years Wright would be an active member of Ashtabula County politics, including a marshal and director of the county infirmary (Williams 48-9). In his younger years, Wright was active as a conductor in the UGRR. One of the escapees who graced his doorstep was that of Lewis Clark. Lewis had been recently released from the grasp of his master on the Lake-Ashtabula County



M.W. WRIGHT

lines by the sheriff. It is told that to make the arrest legal, the Lake County portion of the road was blockaded so the coach carrying Lewis and the master would be forced to turn to the Ashtabula line and allow for the sheriff to make the arrest within his limits (Clark 47).

CONNEAUT

At last we have reached Conneaut on the Lake Erie shore in “Ohio’s Sharpest Corner.” Still standing on Main St. in Conneaut is a little white house named after its builder, Hiram Lake. Many people fail to recognize this place as a place of history. Hiram Lake was a member of the South Ridge Anti-Slavery Society and was also chosen as a delegate with M.W. Wright at Jefferson in 1845 (Clark 44-45). In the present day kitchen you will find a trap door leading into what people probably think was a root cellar. In reality this was the beginning of a tunnel, now filled, which reached the banks of Conneaut Creek, about 500 feet away. It was in this tunnel which Lake’s step daughter would note to be “packed full of negroes,” on her weekend visits home (Seibert 308).

Another place “known” to be a station on the UGRR is an Octagon House that stands on Liberty Street. This house was undoubtedly built for persons fleeing slavery, as it incorporates many features as the Carpenter House in West Andover. The only problem with this house is the date. The Octagon House is believed to have been built circa 1863 by David Cummins. It is because of this date that I believe this house was used sparsely, if at all, as a station. Many people will still argue, however, what about the secret tunnel leading to Conneaut Creek? I believe this to have been incorporated from the previous house which stood on the spot.

CONCLUSION

An unknown number of escaped slaves found freedom in Canada thanks to the many conductors of Ashtabula County. More than a century and a half has passed since these people braved the Fugitive Slave Law to help free the slaves from bondage. It is my hope that after reading this you are further enlightened on your history and may inspire you to seek your own roots.

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