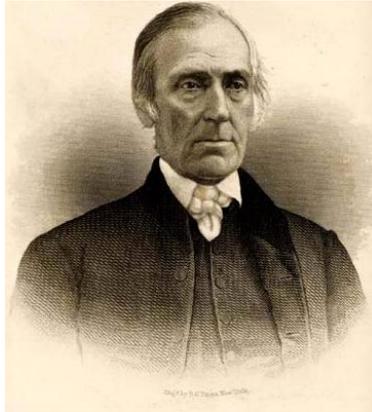


Southerner Headed Underground Railroad

Submitted by Scott D. Myers

Sunday 1798-10-28

This date marks the birth of Levi Coffin in 1798. He was an American abolitionist and president of the Underground Railroad.



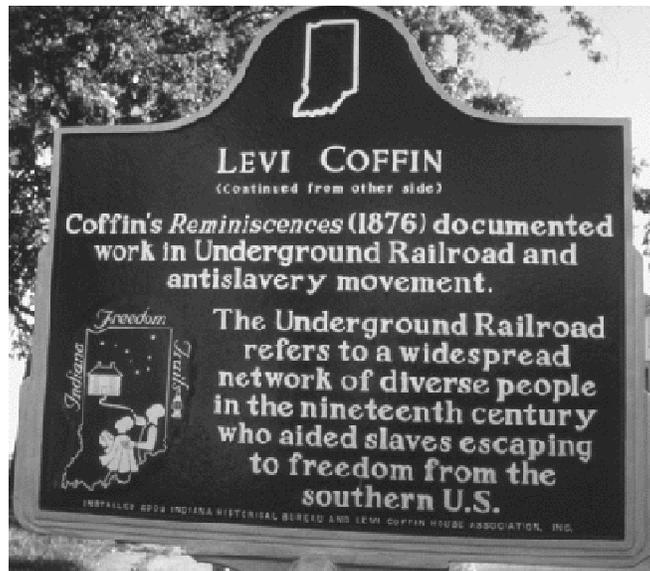
Levi Coffin, from New Garden, N.C., was the only son among seven children. The young Levi received the bulk of his education at home, which proved to be good enough for Coffin to find work as a teacher for several years. In 1821, with his cousin Vestal, Levi Coffin ran a Sunday school for Blacks. Alarmed slave owners, however, soon forced the school to close.

In 1824, Coffin decided to join his other family members who had moved to the young state of Indiana. Establishing a store in Newport, Coffin prospered, expanding his operations to include cutting pork and manufacturing linseed oil. Even with his busy life as a merchant, Coffin was "never too busy to engage in Underground Railroad affairs." Also, his thriving business and importance in the community helped deflect opposition to his Underground Railroad activities from pro-slavery supporters and slave hunters in the area.

Questioned about why he aided slaves, Coffin said "The Bible, in bidding us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, said nothing about color, and I should try to follow out the teachings of that good book." In 1847, Coffin left Newport to open a wholesale warehouse in Cincinnati that handled cotton goods, sugar, and spices produced by free labor. The enterprise had been funded a year earlier by a Quaker Convention at Salem, Indiana.

Coffin and his wife continued to help slaves via the Underground Railroad. Both during and after the Civil War, Coffin served as a leading figure in the Western Freedmen's Aid Society. Working for the freedmen's cause in England and Europe,

Coffin in one year, raised more than \$100,000 for the Society. He died in September 1877, in Cincinnati and is buried in that city's Spring Grove Cemetery.



Reference :

The Encyclopedia Britannica, Fifteenth Edition.

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ISBN 0-85229-633-0