

"The colored people have good reason for respecting and honoring Quakers," said Perry Sanford, a well-known black resident of Battle Creek. His remark was directed at a reporter from the *Sunday Morning Call*, while the two men conversed on the street one August day in 1884.

"Why so?" said the newspaperman.

"Because they were the first people to espouse the anti-slavery cause, and did practical work by inaugurating and assisting to carry on the underground railway system."

"Did you escape from slavery by the underground railway?" the reporter asked.

"I did," Sanford replied.

"Let's go right in here, Perry," the reporter said, leading him to a place where they could sit down together. "The *Call* wants to interview you."

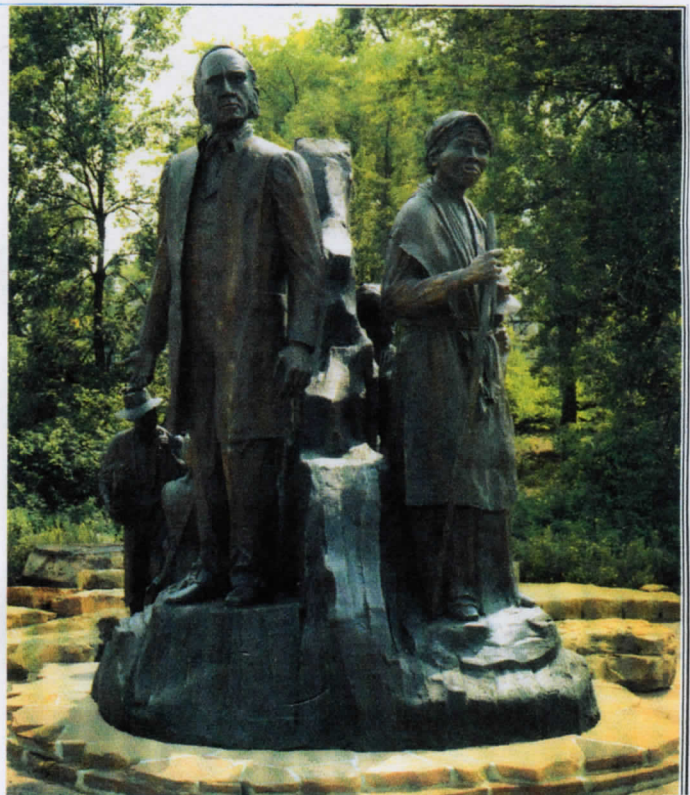


The first question posed to Sanford was a simple one: **"Where were you a slave, Perry?"**

"I was sold and brought up in old Kentucky, in Greenup County," Sanford responded. "I was sold from that county into Boone and from Boone into Kenton. My last master was Milt Graves. A few weeks before I ran away [in April 1847], a party of twenty-two slaves had made their escape. Among the number were William Casey, who used to live in Battle Creek, George Hamilton, father of John Evans, Nelson Stephens and wife and daughter, the latter now Mrs. A.D. Cook of this city. They were all living in my neighborhood."

**"Was it their successful escape that incited you to run away?"**

"No. Their escape alarmed the slave owners and they began to sell off their slaves to the Mississippi cotton planters. One day, the master's son, a talkative youngster, told me that his father had sold us into Mississippi. He was afraid that we were going to run away. I was struck with dismay. The horror of all horrors to the slave was the Mississippi cotton field. It was a living hell. I communicated the startling information I had received to the other slaves while working in the field that day and, during the absence of the overseer, we resolved on an escape. One of our numbers got a pass, went to Covington [Kentucky, across the Ohio River from Cincinnati], and made arrangements with a white man to take us over the river. We left on the night of Easter Monday. This was a holiday. On all holidays, the



Opposite page image courtesy of the Willard Library. Above: Erastus Hussey, depicted at left in this Battle Creek sculpture, helped Sanford after he escaped during the Kentucky Raid. All color images courtesy of the Battle Creek Convention and Visitors Bureau.

slaves could either have their own time to do as they pleased or work. If they worked, they got pay. I worked that day planting corn for a man who kept a store, and he paid me fifty cents. I had \$2.00 that I had earned on previous holidays. This \$2.50 I had when I arrived in Cass County, Michigan. About 10 o'clock at night, twelve of us started for Covington, twelve miles distant. Among the number were Dave Walker and his mother, Susan Reynolds, who used to live in Battle Creek. We all reached Covington except one."

**"What became of that one?"**

"He got drunk. His name was Henry Buckner. In some manner, he got some whiskey and drank so much of it that he could not walk, and he 'fell by the wayside.' We had to leave him behind."

"[The slave owners] found him asleep the next morning, and he told them such a plausible story that he got off rather easy. He said that he had been overpersuaded to run away, and when he began to think about it he made up his mind not to leave his master, and so stayed behind. They gave him a whipping for three mornings in succession and let him go. But they

tied a bell around his neck and he wore that for a long time, so they would know of his whereabouts. He stayed there for about a year and a half and then made his escape. It is needless to say that he didn't drink any whiskey that time. I have since met him in Canada, when over there for a visit."

**"How did you get across the Ohio River?"**

"As I said, we left about 10 o'clock at night and did not arrive in Covington until 4 o'clock in the morning, although a distance of only twelve miles. The reason was that we had to travel across the fields in order to avoid meeting teams and travelers and to pass the tollgates.

The roads there are turnpikes. It was so late when we arrived in Covington that the man who was to meet us there had got tired of waiting and gone home. This was a great disappointment to us, but we started down the bank of the Ohio River and almost providentially found a boat, or as they are called there, a skiff. Into that boat eleven of us crowded. The sides came to within an inch of the water. How we ever got across I don't know. But it was life or death, so we made the attempt and reached Cincinnati in safety.

"As we landed, we saw a colored and a white man standing together. They exclaimed: 'There comes some runaway slaves.' We denied it, but to no use. They proved to be friends, and took us through the back alleys to a station of the underground railway. We were distributed around and secreted in the cellars of business blocks, about two in a place. We were secreted in this manner for a week."

**"How did you get out of Cincinnati?"**

"By the underground railway. When the proper time came, we were ordered to ready one night, when carriages were brought up and we were driven through to Hamilton, Ohio, then to Jonesborough, Indiana, and so forth from one station to the other.



The slave owners captured nine African Americans and took them to the county courthouse in Cassopolis to prove their claims. Instead the owners were charged with assault and kidnapping. Courtesy of the Cass District Library.

"We only traveled nights, and in covered wagons, and would be secreted day times in some Quaker's barn or in the woods. Some places we would stay over a night, and in others several days. We were one month in reaching Cass County. You see, everything had to be done with great caution, as the slave owners were very often close on the track of the fugitives. At a Quaker store in Newport [Indiana], we were all supplied with clothing."

**"I suppose you were in constant fear of capture."**

"Yes, but we had no trouble except at one town, which I have forgotten the name of. As I said before, we were always taken in covered wagons in

the night time from station to station, and had a guide with us. At this place, we were sent out on foot all alone, with instructions how to reach the next station, and were given a route so as to avoid the town. We got on the wrong road and went right into town. Of course, everybody knew that we were runaway slaves, and made remarks about it as we passed along the street, but no one offered to molest us. When we got out of town, we met two slave owners on horseback, who were evidently returning from an unsuccessful hunt after runaways. We had it arranged that a certain person was to be the spokesman for the crowd and all the rest of us were to keep silent, so we would not contradict ourselves. We each had a heavy club and some old pocket knives, and all had resolved to die rather than be captured. These slave dealers were strangers to us and from [another] part of the state. They halted us and enquired where we were going. Our spokesman responded: 'To Turkey Prairie [Indiana].' They replied: 'Yes, you are runaway niggers, where is your pass?' The spokesman replied, holding up his big club: 'Here's our pass, and it will make your eyes sore to read it.' They drew up to one side of the road and drove past us. We felt relieved. They halted after they had passed, and turned around, and we were afraid that they were going to shoot at us, but they finally rode off.

We enquired of two young men who were working in a field where John [Shugart] lived; said we were going to work for him. It seems that [Shugart] only had a small piece of land, and they laughed and said: 'Yes, work for [Shugart], you niggers would eat his farm up in a day.' They told us, however, where he lived. When we arrived at his house, we informed him of what had happened, and he secreted the women in the cellar and hid us men in the woods. When the right time came, we were again hustled off in the night in wagons. This was only one of the many incidents that happened when the slaves were going through on the underground railway. It was a constant apprehension of danger."

**"You said that your first permanent stopping place was in Cass County."**

"Yes, we stopped with the Quakers on Young's Prairie, about three miles from Cassopolis, and near Diamond Lake I stopped with John [Shugart's] brother, Zach [Shugart], and then went to work for old Stephen Bogue. It was here that some forty slave dealers swooped down on the fugitives early [on the morning of August 17, 1847] and captured them."

**"Did they capture you?"**

"No. I got away. Did you ever hear about that affair?"

**"No, I never did."**

"That was one of the most exciting anti-slavery events that ever happened in Michigan. They came down in a body and captured nearly all the slaves in that section [of the township]. You see, the slave owners knew this Quaker settlement and they knew it was headquarters for escaped slaves. They brought tobacco wagons with them in which to carry back the fugitives. Did you ever see a tobacco wagon?"

**"No, I never did."**

"They are a very heavy, cumbersome wagon, and an odd looking affair. They have a deep box, which curves up at both ends like a sleigh runner, and are hauled by six horses."

**"How did you make your escape?"**

"I and Rube Stephens were living with Joe Sandford and family, which consisted of his wife and little daughter. It was in one of Stephen Bogue's log cabins. Rube and I slept up in a garret. About 4 o'clock, there

came a knock at the door. Sandford enquired: 'Who's there?' 'A friend,' came the reply. We all recognized it as the voice of Jack Graves, the master of Sandford and the brother of my master. He said: 'Open the door, Joe.' But Joe did not open the door. He commenced to yell murder in order to arouse Stephen Bogue. The slave masters then smashed in the window and thrust a double barrel shot gun in. We all kept heavy hickory clubs in the cabin and Sandford grabbed his club and struck at them through the window. They thought it was a gun and ran, leaving their shot gun. We were so frightened that we never grabbed that gun, but left it there for them to recover, as they soon returned. Sandford attempted to run but was captured, as was also his wife and daughter. Rube Stephens ran out and succeeded in escaping. Our cabin roof was what is known as a shake roof. I pushed aside the shakes, crawled out, and then jumped to the ground. If you ever saw lively running, I did it then. I reached a corn field and got away from them. I alarmed Stephen Bogue and he mounted his horse and ran him to Cassopolis to alarm the people there. Mrs. Bogue secreted me upstairs in their house. Do you remember William Casey, who used to live in Battle Creek?"

**"Yes, I knew him well."**

"He had a terrible fight with them. You know that he was a powerful man. Three of them came into his cabin, when he grabbed a three-legged stool and gave them a battle. He struck his young master a terrible blow, from which he afterward died on reaching his home in Kentucky. They pounded Casey dreadfully with clubs and overcame him, and handcuffed him, also captured his daughter, Mary. Mrs. Casey escaped to the corn field, where one of her young masters attacked her, but she was too much for him and gave him a dreadful licking, and escaped. After they had secured what slaves they could, they started out on the return. My chum, Rube Stephens, when he escaped, started for Bill Jones' house, a Quaker, who was known as 'Nigger Bill,' on account of his great friendship for the colored people. Jones mounted his horse and headed off the whole party. The slave owners had revolvers and Bowie knives and threatened to shoot him. He had no arms himself. But told them he could shoot as fast as they could, and parleyed with them until a party of forty men came up from Cassopolis under command of that good old Quaker, Stephen Bogue, who had got out the papers for their arrest for destroying his property and breaking into his houses. [The slave owners] were taken into

Cassopolis, and darkies and all put in jail.”

**“How did the trial result?”**

“I have forgotten. Besides this trial, they then commenced suit for the recovery of their slaves. They sent to Kentucky and got their most able lawyers. The trial lasted for several weeks, when the verdict was given that all colored men were not property in Michigan. Before this, however, all of them had made their escape from jail. Every time they would take them from the jail to the courthouse, one or two of them would very mysteriously escape from the sheriff. The slave owners finally went home an awfully disgusted and mad crowd. They didn't take their old tobacco wagons back with them. Every morning, a wheel would be missing from those wagons, until every one had disappeared. Those wheels are now resting peacefully in the bottom of Diamond Lake.”

**“Where did you go after this affair?”**

“In company with Casey and many others, I took the underground railway for Battle Creek. We got here in

the night and were put in the care of Erastus Hussey, who had charge of the station here. I have been here ever since. We went to work for Jeremiah Brown, David Cady, and other farmers.”

**“Did you ever have any more excitement?”**

“We were in a constant state of alarm, and when Millard Fillmore was elected president and the fugitive slave law was passed [in 1850], every colored person left Battle Creek for Canada except William Casey and myself. Casey sent his wife and family. I worked on farms about here until I went to work for Nichols and Shepard [an agricultural machinery manufacturer].”

**“Did you ever expect to live to see the slaves emancipated?”**

“No. I could not believe such a thing possible. The Quakers had great faith in a time coming when slavery would be abolished, and always told us so, but I could not realize or imagine such a thing. But, thank God, it is now a reality.”