



The Underground Railroad and the Kentucky Raid in Cass County, MI.
 FROM History of Cass County, Michigan
 With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches
 of some of it's Prominent Men and Pioneers.
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THE so-called Kentucky raid, which grew out of the workings of the "Underground Railroad," was a very unique and interesting episode in the history of Cass County, and one which produced some far reaching results.

The Underground Railroad, as it has been happily called, from the dark, mysterious nature of its operations, was organized and carried on by a few hundred, or perhaps thousands, of earnest philanthopists, scattered through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan. Its founders and operators were men who entertained a firm conviction that human slavery was a sin, and that it should, therefore, be combated. They assisted many thousand fugitive slaves in their journey toward the north star and freedom. The railroad which afforded transportation to the poor blacks, was one of many ramifications, a vast system of routes, each one of which extended from some point on the border of the Slave States to the Canada line. Two of these routes, one from the Ohio River and the other from the Mississippi, formed a junction in Cass County. The first of these was known as the "Quaker line," and the other as the "Illinois line." Of the latter, John Cross was the projector. It was put into operation in 1842. The "Quaker line," so called because almost entirely managed by the Quaker settlers in Indiana and Michigan, was opened to travel prior to 1840. Every Quaker settlement along the line was a station. At all of them were afforded rest, refreshment and that retirement from publicity which was always grateful to the colored traveler.

In Cass County, the houses of Ishmael Lee, Stephen Bogue, Zachariah Shugart and Josiah Osborn (all Quakers), were stations of much importance. W. S. Elliott, conductor, brought fugitive slaves through to these men from L. P. Alexander, agent at Niles, and they were sent onward toward Canada by way of Flowerfield, in St. Joseph County, and Schoolcraft, in Kalamazoo County. William Wheeler was the agent at the former, and Dr. Nathan M. Thomas at the latter station. William Jones, of Calvin, known as "Nigger Bill," and Wright Modlin, of Williamsville, were famous "nigger runners," and made frequent trips to the Ohio River, and sometimes to Kentucky soil, for the purpose of assisting and

guiding fugitives to freedom. The number of runaway slaves who passed through Cass County, prior to 1848, and who were given aid in one way or another by the Abolitionists, was probably not less than fifteen hundred. Dr. Thomas, of Schoolcraft, estimated that he had assisted at least a thousand upon their way, and he by no means received all who journeyed through this county.

The men engaged in "nigger running," and those who gave the slaves food and shelter along the road were engaged in a business which made them amenable to law, and which placed their property, and even their lives sometimes in jeopardy. Operations were, therefore, carried on with the utmost cunning and stealth. The trains upon the Underground Railroad were usually run at night, and the human freight, when unloaded at a station, was carefully concealed. Each station agent knew the name of the next agent ahead of him, but was ignorant of the identity of the one behind, unless he learned it by accident. The conductors, when applying for hospitality for their passengers, either at regular stations, or occasional stopping places, to which they resorted in case of accident on the road, invariably used as a password the query, "Can you furnish entertainment for myself and another person?" The form of question never underwent the slightest change.

Often the owners of escaped slaves, or agents employed by them, came through the country in search of their property, and many amusing tales might be told of the manner in which they were sometimes foiled. Occasionally the fugitives were discovered, and marched back to slavery ahead of their master's horses.

As time progressed, the slaves enjoyed greater immunity from the danger of pursuit and recapture, and many of them finding occupation in Michigan, remained here with friends, thinking that they would be nearly as safe as in Canada.

In Cass County, in the beginning of the year 1847, there were at least fifty runaway slaves. The number has been estimated as high as one hundred, but the former statement is nearer the truth. Most of them were in Penn and Calvin Townships, where the chief Quaker settlements were located. All of the Quakers entertained Abolition. sentiments, and there were many people in this vicinity who, as a rule, sympathized with them. Another colony of colored people was formed in Calhoun County.

Some of the fugitives who had settled down in Cass County owned small tracts of ground, for which they were about equally indebted to their own industry, and the generosity of their white friends. All were willing to work and conducted themselves in an inoffensive manner, gaining the respect of the people around them. That they were not secure in their newly found homes was soon made manifest. During the years 1846 and 1847, spies were sent out from Kentucky to hunt for fugitive slaves in various neigh. borhoods in Ohio, Indiana and Michigan. One of them who came to Michigan, was in the employ of an association of Bourbon County, Ky., planters, formed for the purpose of recovering their runaway slaves. Perhaps no neighborhood in the whole South had suffered more losses than Bourbon County, and it so happened that a large proportion of the blacks who had colonized in Cass and Calhoun Counties, were from that region.

Early in 1847, a young man who gave his name as Carpenter, arrived in Kalamazoo, and entered the law office of Charles E. Stewart, for the alleged purpose of studying law. He represented himself as from Worcester County, Mass., and professed to be a strong Abolitionist. He was in reality a spy sent out by the planters of Bourbon County, Ky.

After remaining a short time in Mr. Stewart's office, and gaining some information in regard to the location of the fugitives' settlements, he started out to visit them, thus to obtain more minute and definite knowledge. Still playing the role of the Yankee Abolitionist, he went in turn to the Calhoun and Cass County colonies, spending considerable time in each. Adopting the shrewd device of canvassing for Eastern Abolition journals, he readily obtained admission and hospitable entertainment at the houses of the Quakers and other friends of the negro, and easily received such information as he desired. He ascertained the number and the exact location of the fugitives, and the places from which they had "emigrated" in Kentucky.

Not long after his visit to Calhoun County a party of Kentuckians, led by one Francis Trautman, appeared there and endeavored to kidnap the Crosswhite family, former slaves. In this they were foiled by the neighbors who came to the defense of the negroes some two hundred strong. The slave hunters returned to Kentucky, and great excitement was aroused by the tales which they told of the Abolition outrage. Indignation meetings were held and a memorial presented to the State Legislature setting forth in vigorous language the wrongs which the would be kidnapers and the owners of the slaves had suffered. An appropriation was made by the State to aid her citizens in seeking redress. Suit was brought by the owners of the slaves against a number of the leading citizens of Calhoun County to recover the value of their chattels and damages because of riot. The parties made defendants to the suit were Dr. O. C. Comstock, Charles T. Gorham (late United States Minister to the Hague) and Jarvis Hurd, they being among the crowd assembled on the occasion of the alleged riot, who were known to be responsible financially. The first trial resulted in a divided jury, and the second, which came off in 1848, in a verdict against the defendants for \$1,900 and costs. The late Zachariah Chandler was brought into political prominence indirectly by this suit. He headed a subscription paper with \$100 and succeeded in raising (principally in Detroit) the amount which the defendants were required to pay. His activity did much to make him popular among the people who afterward gave him their suffrages.

Before the Calhoun County riot case was brought to a conclusion in the courts, another and similar one was commenced that which grew out of the Kentucky raid in Cass County.

A party of thirteen Kentuckians driving fine horses attached to comfortable covered wagons, arrived in Michigan about the 1st of August, 1847. They made their first stop at Battle Creek, took lodgings at the hotel, and representing themselves to be engaged in vending some kind of domestic machinery, made excursions into the country, ostensibly to conduct business with the farmers. There were a number of fugitive slaves living in the vicinity of Battle Creek, and the Kentuckians had doubtless gone there to capture them. Before their plans were perfected, however, their mission was discovered. Erastus Hussey, gathering the strangers in the village tavern, told them that the citizens knew them to be slave hunters and that they must depart immediately from the town and its neighborhood. He further informed them that the people would not allow any of the negroes there to be returned into slavery, and intimated that those who contemplated seizing them for that purpose, were endangering themselves by longer remaining in the vicinity. The Kentuckians left.

Immediately after their departure, Mr. Hussey, conceiving that they would visit the Cass County negro settlements, dispatched letters to Stephen Bogue and Zachariah Shugart, to

put them on their guard against the invasion. It transpired subsequently that Mr. Hussey's kind intention failed in its object, because of the slowness of the mails. Another warning, which had its source in Kentucky, also arrived too late. It was forwarded through the efforts of the late Levi Coffin, "the reputed President of the Underground Railroad," who, in his "Reminiscences," has told the story as follows:

"Slaves often have friends living in Slave States-people whose principles are unknown to the slaveholders. One of this class, a man living in the neighborhood of the Kentucky slaveholders, became apprised of all their plans for capturing the fugitives in Michigan, but was' misinformed in regard to the time they were to start. He wrote to a confidential friend in Cincinnati, informing him of all the plans of the raiders, but stated the time of their starting incorrectly they started several days earlier. His friend came directly to me, and gave me all the information he had received. I at once set about to intercept their plans. I was well acquainted at Young's Prairie, Mich. There was a settlement of friends there, many of whom had emigrated from Wayne County, Ind., and were among the early settlers of the neighborhood. Some had formerly been my neighbors in Indiana. I had been at Young's Prairie and visited several of the families of fugitives in that settlement. Friends had established a school among them, and they seemed to be prospering. I decided to send a messenger at once to apprise them and their friends of the danger. At that day, letters were often eight or ten days in reaching Young's Prairie, and I knew it would not do to risk sending a message by mail; it would not reach them in time.

"A young man then boarding with us, an active and energetic Abolitionist, volunteered to go if his expenses were paid. I agreed to pay his expenses, and started him at once. As there were no railroads or stage lines then, we had to depend on private conveyance for the journey. I gave the young man letters to my friends in the various neighborhoods in Indiana, through which he would pass, requesting them to furnish him with fresh horses on the stages of his journey. This was promptly done on his way through Wayne, Randolph and Grant Counties, Ind., and greatly facilitated his journey to Michigan. But his laborious effort proved too late; the raid was over."

But to return to the Kentuckians. Upon leaving Battle Creek they had driven southward into Indiana, and rendezvoused at Bristol. After remaining there a day or so, they moved northward after nightfall into Cass County, entering Porter Township, and traversing it until they reached a point near the southeast corner of Calvin, where a halt was made. It was their intention to kidnap the negroes in Calvin and Penn, and retreat as quickly as possible to Bristol. They had in their possession, as was afterward ascertained, very accurately drawn maps upon which the houses which sheltered the fugitives were carefully designated. These had undoubtedly been made by Carpenter, the spy. They had little difficulty in following the roads which the maps exhibited, and made their way quietly and without being observed, to the vicinity of Josiah Osborn's dwelling, near the east line of Calvin (Section 24). Their wagons had been left two miles down the road where the party had halted, and they were thus enabled to proceed more rapidly and more stealthily. At Osborn's, several of the raiders stopped, but the larger number pushed on to the other localities in which they knew their human chattels were to be found. The plan was to divide, seize them as nearly simultaneously as was possible, hasten back to Osborn's, join the men left there, proceed together to the point where the wagons were left, and then drive rapidly southward a little over three miles and cross the Indiana line. But "the best laid plans of mice and men gang aft a'glee."

Several months before the time of which we write, a family of five fugitive slaves, tired, foot sore and sick, had arrived at Mr. Osborn's, on their way to Canada, and had been allowed to stop and rest. Subsequently, as they were satisfied to remain, thinking they had traveled far enough north to be safe, they had been given employment on the farm. The family consisted of an old man, his wife, two sons and a daughter. They occupied a small house, a few rods from the one in which the Osborn family lived. The three males of this slave family were the first persons captured by the raiders. They were seized and handcuffed in bed, making little or no resistance. The mother and daughter escaped by jumping from a window and concealing themselves. The men, manacled together, were marched out to the road. Josiah Osborn immediately sent out messengers, who apprised the farmers in the neighborhood of the capture, and, in an almost incredible short time, a large and excited company had gathered at his house.

The party who made the arrest at Osborn's had intended to await the return of their comrades from Young's Prairie, but finding themselves surrounded by a throng of angry and threatening men; among them some free negroes, they became uneasy. They were annoyed, too, by the delay of their friends, and, as the night wore away and they did not return, were filled with apprehension that they had met with the same kind of trouble experienced by themselves. After anxious consultation, they moved off to the northward, with their three captives, closely followed by the crowd of men and boys who had assembled about them.

In the meantime, the other company of slave hunters had made captures in Penn Township, and met with a reception similar to that of the party at Osborn's.

They went first to the East settlement in Calvin, where William East and several sons, all members of the Society of Friends, had their residence. Here they captured three men, a woman and a child. The raiders were resisted by one of the male slaves, but they battered down the door of his cabin and overpowered him. They found lying upon the bed a child about two years old, which one of the Kentuckians, the Rev. A. Stevens, a Baptist minister, claimed as his property. He was the owner of the mother, and although the child had been born on free soil, it was his, according to the principle of slave law, which declared that a child followed the condition of its mother. The mother had made her escape when the cabin was attacked and could not be found. But the Rev. Mr. Stevens secured her by a stratagem. Taking the babe in his arms and making it cry he started toward the road. The voice of the infant reached the mother, as was intended, and emerging from her hiding place she was made a captive.

The raiders went next to the neighborhood of Zachariah Shugarts house, which stood where Vandalia now is. One of the families of fugitives who lived here had leased a piece of land of Mr. Shugart, built a snug cabin upon it and were prospering finely. The cabin was approached stealthily and suddenly entered. A negro man was seized but his wife made her escape unobserved through a window. She ran to Zachariah Shugart's, aroused the family, gave the alarm and then secreted herself and managed to escape capture.

Immediately upon being informed of the raid by the slave woman, Shugart mounted his horse and rode as fast as he could to the house of Stephen Bogue, who lived about two miles west. Bogue had a very fleet horse, which he saddled and rode at its utmost speed to Cassopolis, to give the alarm and to have the proceedings of the kidnapers arrested.

Passing on to Stephen Bogue's, the party secured a man who lived in a cabin upon his farm. Here they met with determined and vigorous resistance. The door of the cabin was securely fastened. The negro's master demanded admittance, but his voice was recognized and the occupant of the cabin refused to throw open the door. It was soon battered down, however, and the black man overpowered, though he fought stoutly against his enemy. The blow which finally prostrated him was dealt with the butt end of a heavy riding whip and it cut a terrible gash through his ear and across the side of his head.

The company of raiders now turned southward to effect a retreat into Indiana. A crowd of excited men gathered about and followed them. The night was now nearly gone. The alarm had been spread with amazing swiftness, and the throng rapidly increased in numbers. At Odell's Mill, a short distance south of the site of Vandalia, the company from the prairie with its undesired escort of Abolitionists, met the party who had kidnaped the negroes from Osborn's and the East settlement. About the same time and just as daylight came on, a large number of people from Cassopolis, to whom Stephen Bogue had carried the news, arrived upon the scene. Their leader was Moses Brown, a powerfully built blacksmith, and as staunch an Abolitionist as any in the land. "Nigger Bill" Jones was also present and several other resolute characters.

The Kentuckians were now given to understand that they could not proceed further southward, unless they went without the negroes. They were all armed with pistols and bowie knives. Nearly every man among their opponents had a stout club in his hand, and there were doubtless some other weapons carried less conspicuously. Angry words were exchanged, violent threats made, and it was evident that a feeling existed which might become uncontrollable. A battle was imminent, and might at any moment have been precipitated by a single act of violence. But there were many Quakers present, men like the Orsborns, Bagues, Shugarts and Lasts, and their wise counsel that only peaceable and lawful measures should be employed to attain the desired end, finally triumphed over the sanguinary spirit exhibited by the larger part of the mob.

It was agreed, after much discussson, that the Keutuckians should go to the county seat, submit their case to a Justice of the Peace, and prove their property, as the law required.

"Nigger Bill" Jones particularly distinguished himself during the excited conference at Odell's Mill, and upon the march to Cassopolis. It is said that he dextrously disarmed a man who drew a pistol and threatened to shoot him, and several other similar acts are reported of which he was the hero. Soon after the motley crowd started from Odell's Mill, Jones compelled Hubbard Buckner, one of the Kentuckians, to dismount from his horse in order that one of the negroes taken at Osborn's, who was sick, might ride. Having thus unhorsed one of the enemy, Jones playfully slipped the shackle which had bound the negro's wrist upon his own. It closed with a snap, and could not again be opened, the key being lost. Consequently the wearer trudged along the road manacled to the remaining one of the original pair of chained chattels. The Rev. A. Stevens was compelled to carry the babe which he had captured.

About 9 o'clock in the morning, the strange procession entered Oassopolis. It was composed of thirteen Kentuckians, their nine shackled captives and a crowd of at least three hundred citizens. During the time that had elapsed between the bringing of the news and the arrival of the concourse in town, it had been constantly increasing in size, by reason of the addition of various small parties met upon the road and merged in its mass.

In Cassopolis, the utmost excitement prevailed. The public square was thronged with people, the majority of whom, though not Abolitionists, sympathized with the negroes and plainly indicated their intense disapprobation of the Kentuckians.

The slaves were soon conducted to Joshua Barnum's tavern and a guard stationed at the door of the room they occupied.

The Kentuckians had not been long in Cassopolis before they secured the services of George B. Turner, at that time a young man and only the year before admitted to the bar. He told them very frankly that although the law was up on their side, it would be almost an absolute impossibility even if an order was secured from any court in Cass County, remanding their slaves, to take them from the county. Mr. Turner offered nevertheless to take every legal step which was possible, and he did so.

Preparations were made to prove the ownership of the slaves and to recover possession of them, a writ of restitution being applied for before D. M. Howell, Justice of the Peace, under provisions of the law of 1793. Ezekiel S. Smith, Esq., and James Sullivan, Esq., appeared on behalf of the fugitives and obtained an adjournment of the case for three days.

Sheriff Barak Mead immediately after the adjournment was secured served a writ upon all of the Kentuckians (except one Graves, whom the defense had in hiding) for kidnaping, arrested four of them on the charge of trespassing upon the premises of Josiah Osborn, and one upon the charge of assault and battery. Their bail was fixed by Justice Howell at \$2,600, and Asa Kingsbury, Amos Dow and Daniel McIntosh were accepted as sureties for the amount. The names of the raiders which have been preserved, in the memory of old residents, are nine in number, as follows : Rev. A. Stevens, Hubbard Buckner, C. B. Rust, John L. Graves (Sheriff of Bourbon County), James Scott. G. W. Brazier, Thornton Timberlake, -- Bristow and -- Lemon.

A. H. Redfield, Esq., who was at that time Circuit Court Commissioner of Cass County being absent, the friends of the fugitives sent to Niles to secure a writ of habeas corpus, under which they might take them to Berrien County. James Brown, Esq., of Niles, volunteered his services as assistant counsel for the fugitives, with Messrs. Sullivan and Smith, and advised Mr. McIlvain that he might legally go to Cass County to try the case. He accordingly did so, and a writ of habeas corpus was sworn out, which required the Kentuckians to show cause why the alleged slaves should not be discharged from custody. The Commissioner heard the case on Monday, and decided adversely to the Kentuckians. Mr. Turner, their lawyer, offered, first, the statutes of the State of Kentucky, which included the State and National Constitutions, as evidence that the institution of slavery existed in that State, and argued that the Commissioner, as well as all the courts, State and National, were bound to notice judicially the existence of slavery in the States where it was recognized by the Constitution or laws of the United States. Upon this latter point, he made his strongest argument, but upon both was overruled by the Commissioner. In this connection, it may not be amiss to state that Mr. Turner offered oral testimony, as well as documentary evidence from courts of record in Kentucky, to show that slavery had a legal existence in that State, but he was, on all points, overruled. Mr. Turner then boldly charged the Commissioner with illegal and corrupt rulings; amongst other things, that he had no jurisdiction of the case and came to the county as the willing

tool of men bent on violating the laws of the State and the United States. . It was generally acknowledged that Mr. McIlvain did not have jurisdiction in Cass County, and it was afterward so held by the United States District Court at Detroit, and further held that even if the Commissioner had jurisdiction, he was bound to recognize, officially, the existence of slavery as a legal institution in States where recognized by the laws of the United States. But the Commissioner's decision nevertheless liberated the nine fugitives. They were immediately taken to the house of Ishmael Lee, a mile south of Cassopolis, and a few days later, with more than forty others, left for Canada on a train of the Underground Railroad, of which Zachariah Shugart was conductor.

Three days had elapsed between the time the raiders arrived in Cassopolis and the day when Commissioner McIlvain rendered decision against them. During those three days, they had been angered almost beyond endurance by colloquys with various citizens, and several times personal encounters seemed imminent; but disgraceful scenes of that kind were, happily, averted. When the Circuit Court Commissioner's decision was rendered, and the fugitives removed, there was no longer any object in prosecuting the raiders, and the suits against them were dropped. They were crestfallen at the turn affairs had taken, and their only recourse was to bring suit for recovery of the value of the slaves against citizens who were financially responsible, and this they made preparations to do. In the meantime, a single and small grain of comfort was left them. A runaway slave, whom one of them claimed as his property, had been convicted of some petty crime a short time before the raid was made, and, being unable to pay the fine imposed upon him, was serving out a sentence in the county jail. This man, at least, the Kentuckians thought they had secured. He certainly could not be spirited away to Canada. But lo! when they looked for him at the jail, he was gone. Some ardent Abolitionist had paid his fine and set him free.

An incident of some interest, the particulars of which have never yet been related in print, occurred just after the Kentuckians started from Cassopolis upon their return South. They were preceded upon the road by Josiah Osborn, who was going to his home in Calvin; and that was a very fortunate circumstance indeed for the Kentuckians. Osborn had gone but a little way along the road in Calvin, when he espied four negroes in a cornfield. They were armed with rifles, and a little questioning revealed the fact that they were lying in ambush for the purpose of firing upon the slaveholders, whom they knew must soon pass by. They expressed a very firm determination to carry out their design, and were laboring under considerable excitement. It required all of the good Quaker's power of argument and his most earnest protestation, to prevail upon them to desist from their murderous purposes, but they finally promised to do so and dispersed. A half hour later the raiders passed safely by the spot where, but for Osborn's lucky discovery, some of them must inevitably have met with death. The negroes afterward denied that they had intended to take life, but said their plan was for each of them to take such aim as to break a man's leg and kill the horse he rode. Then they intended to make their escape to Canada. They said they "wanted to give the slaveholders something to remember Michigan by," and it is altogether probably that their bitter hatred would have led them to shoot in such manner as to kill instead of wound their victims.

In February, 1848, the Kentuckians brought suit to recover the value of their slaves, in the United States Circuit Court, at Detroit. The defendants were D. T. Nicholson, Stephen Bogue, Josiah Osborn, Ishmael Lee, Zachariah Shugart, Jefferson Osborn, William Jones and Ebenezer McIlvain, Abner Pratt, of Marshall, and Francis Trautman (the Kentuckian

who acted as leader in the Calhoun County raid) appeared in behalf of the plaintiffs, and Jacob M. Howard, of Detroit (afterward United States Senator) James L. Jerneygan, of South Bend, Ind., and Ezekiel S. Smith, were the attorneys for defendants, the last named being the attorney of record.

The ease was continued several times, and finally came to trial in the latter part of 1850. In January, 1851, it was concluded, the jury disagreeing. The principal witness for the prosecution, Jonathan Cruise, of South Bend, was arrested on the charge of perjury as soon as he left the stand, and the jury before which he was tried, stood nine to three for his conviction.

At the disagreement of the jury, D. T. Nicholson paid the sum of \$1,000 to clear himself and Ishmael Lee. This virtually settled the cause of the Kentucky slave owners against the Michigan Abolitionists. The total costs of the case, which amounted to about \$3,000, were borne by the several defendants, Nicholson included. The number of witnesses subpoenaed by both sides was somewhere from forty to fifty, and many depositions were taken, especially by the plaintiffs. The witnesses for the defense charged, as a rule, only the amount of their actual expenses. Had they received the legal fees, the costs of the suit would have been much larger.

The sum of \$1,000 paid by Mr. Nicholson, was according to rumor, appropriated by Abner Pratt, Esq., as his fee in the case, and the slave owners never received any portion of it. And so ended, as far as the Cass County people were immediately interested, this "celebrated ease." The Kentucky raid, however, had other effects than those locally observable. With the Van Zant case in Ohio, it had a strong bearing upon the passage of the fugitive slave law of 1850, which, in turn, brought slavery into a more pronounced position as a political issue, and powerfully influenced in one way or another all subsequent legislation upon the "peculiar institution."

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