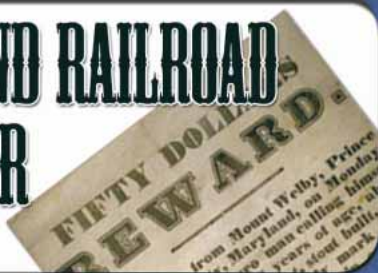


UNDERGROUND RAILROAD DRIVING TOUR



Mercer County Underground Railroad Driving Tour
(Estimated tour time, without side trips, is 4 to 5 hours.)
(This tour begins in the Borough of Mercer.)

The Underground Railroad (URR) was a loose grouping of people who believed that "all men are created equal" and went to great lengths to help runaway slaves escape bondage. There was no central control or planning. Abolition was the great moral issue of the Nineteenth Century. The country split over this issue—not just North and South, but within communities, churches, and sometimes families. Abolition and a variety of other issues took the Union into the Civil War. Both the abolitionists and the runaways were heroic. The penalties were severe. Slave Catchers dragged fugitive slaves back to their masters—beaten and possibly mutilated. The stationmaster on the URR could be jailed and fined \$20,000 (more than \$312,000 today)—a value far more than most people owned at that time. Therefore, the Underground Railroad was secretive; there were no records kept and little information written until later. Much of the story is lost to history, destroyed by modern improvements and scattered throughout the County. With the above-mentioned ideas in mind, here is Mercer County's story.



**Stop #1: Headquarters of
Mercer County Historical Society (MCHS)**
(119 South Pitt Street):

Dr. James Magoffin Jr. built the Magoffin House. He was a supporter

of the URR and was a “copperhead”—or peace Democrat. We have no evidence he used his house as a stationhouse on the URR. However, local oral tradition claims his outbuildings were an overflow area. His neighbor, William F. Clark, concealed fugitive slaves in his house (no longer standing).

To the north of the Magoffin House is the Headquarters of the MCHS. On this site was the Zahniser & Company Store. This red edifice was a “free labor” shop. This store only sold items grown or produced by freemen—nothing produced by slave labor. These items cost significantly more than normal, so it was a good bet that anyone frequenting this store had pro-abolition sentiments.

Behind the Magoffin House is the Thomas McClain Print Shop. Originally built on South Diamond Street by Fountain Reed as a barbershop, he eventually bequeathed the business to his son, George. George Reed was an African-American who walked to Pittsburgh to join the Army during the Civil War, but was unable to do so. He traveled via railway to Massachusetts—the only State allowing African-Americans to enlist at that time—where he joined the Army. During the 1970’s, the McClain family donated the building to the MCHS which moved it to the backyard.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: Why not tour the Mercer County Historical Society (1 to 3 hours)?



Proceed south on Pitt Street. Sons of James Magoffin owned the next three houses on the block.

Stop #2: Hanna/Small Houses (Northeast corner of Pitt and Beaver Streets):

The house on the corner is the Hanna House. Behind the house is a flagstone. During renovations in the 1940’s, a passageway was uncovered under the flagstone. Under the kitchen was a space large enough for several men. North of the Hanna House is the Small House. The Hanna and Small families were abolitionists and close friends. There was a rumor circulating that a tunnel connected the houses. We have no evidence of that at this time. There are rumors of URR “tunnels” throughout the area. There are two aspects to this—first, there are no tunnels running from the South to the North—the URR is not some sort of subway. Second, there were some underground structures used by runaway slaves—even if they were simple basements, or a hidden one.




WHILE YOU ARE HERE: If you continue down Pitt Street and go straight onto Hope Mills Road, the heirs of Joseph Junkin owned the family farm about a mile and a half down the road. The buildings are no longer in existence. The Junkin family was active in the URR. Junkin’s granddaughter was the first wife of Confederate General “Stonewall” Jackson.



Turn right onto Beaver Street and proceed to first stop sign.


Stop #3: Kilgore House (Northwest corner of Erie and Beaver Streets):


The Kilgore Family was vehemently anti-slavery. Daughter Elizabeth remembered seeing up to thirteen runaways at one time in her house. Mrs. Kilgore tried to teach the youngsters how to write and on one occasion “lost” a pen for her efforts.


 At the first stop sign on Beaver Street, turn left onto Route 19, proceed beyond Interstate 80, bear to the right about one-half mile beyond the interstate (New Castle-Mercer Road), cross over Indian Run, and proceed to White Chapel Church

Stop #4: White Chapel Church:

White Chapel Church owes its existence to the issue of abolition. Like many communities and churches, there were deep divides over slavery—even in a “free state.” Many churches split over this issue. White Chapel became a new church after the congregation in New Wilmington split. The pro-abolition faction, led by John Young, created White Chapel Church, which became an area of intense abolition activities. John Young was ardent and led the group by example—moving runaway slaves north. Dr. Charles Everett was a wealthy slave owner from Virginia. Upon his death, he ordered his slaves freed, given a plot of land, and some money. Pandenarium—the name of the small town—was built in Mercer County near White Chapel at Indian Run. Enjoy the rural vistas around White Chapel and Indian Run; however, drive carefully as this is Amish country.

 As you proceed south, beyond the church, you will come to a stop sign (Leesburg Station Road). Stay straight on New Castle-Mercer Road to the next stop sign (Route 208). Turn left following Route 208 and left again at the second stop sign onto Route 19. You will pass Route 208 (to the right) and proceed through Leesburg toward Mercer.

 **WHILE YOU ARE HERE:** If you continue on Route 208 (a right in Leesburg off Route 19), you will pass the Prime Outlet Mall. Shopping is recreation too! If you continue beyond the mall, you will enter Grove City. Why not visit the Grove City Historical Society on College Avenue (allow 1 to 2 hours)?

 The route of the tour has you turning left off Route 208 onto Route 19. With a short side trip, you can visit scenic Leesburg Falls. Turn right off Route 19 onto Leesburg Station Road—at the bend go straight on Falls Road. About 3/10 of a mile from Route 19, there is parking on the right and the Falls on the left. Heading back to Route 19, stop at Neshannock Woods and Company, Fine Furniture Makers and Educational Center, located on Leesburg Station Road on the right, just after the stop sign on Falls Road.



Stop #5: Johnston Tavern:

This was a stop on the URR. Local folklore claims that during the vulnerable daylight hours the stationmaster chained the runaway slaves in the basement. The rumor says you can see hooks in the walls used to confine the slaves.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: Please note the Pennsylvania Historical Marker for the Johnston Tavern. If you are hungry, there are several restaurants on the way to Stop #6.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: Please note the variety and quality of architectural styles in all of our communities.



Proceed back to Mercer; turn right onto South Diamond Street

Stop #6: Bingham House:

Across the street from the Courthouse and east of the Old County Jail (circa 1860) is the boyhood home of John Armor Bingham. John learned abolitionism at his mother's knee. He met the Marquis de Lafayette (Revolutionary War hero) during Lafayette's United States tour, was educated and became a teacher, then a lawyer. He left Mercer County and had a successful political career. Bingham was one of the first Republicans elected to the House of Representatives and served as a major during the Civil War. He was the judge advocate general (JAG) in the conspirators' trial for the murder of Abraham Lincoln, and served again as JAG in the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson. John Armor Bingham also wrote the first section of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution—prohibiting slavery by any other name. Later in life, John became the first Minister to a newly opened Japan.



Proceed around Courthouse; there were four courthouses in the history of Mercer County. Events that occurred here included African-American freemen getting verification of their status, hearings for runaways, public meetings, and other legal actions. Return to Route 19 (Erie Street), turn right, proceed to West Venango Street, and turn right, then left into Bethany Church parking lot (Strawberry Alley).



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: Please note the Courthouse (During business hours, the newly renovated building makes a wonderful ½ to 1 hour tour.), Civil War Memorial, World War II Memorial, and grounds. Also notice the Pennsylvania Historical Markers located on the north side and north portico of the Courthouse. These markers note the founding of Mercer County, the Soldiers and Sailors Orphan School located in Mercer after the Civil War, and the county and borough's namesake, General Hugh Mercer. See the Memorial and Honor Garden—to the east and west of the portico.

Stop #7: Bethany Presbyterian Church:

The second Mercer County Jail is across the street from the church (stone building with a frame home abutting it—the warden's residence). Slave Catchers housed the fugitive slaves in the County Jail for safekeeping while they filed the appropriate paperwork at the courthouse.

One of the pastors of Bethany, William Taggart McAdam, was a staunch Unionist and delivered sermons about the troubles of the day, which became divisive among the population of the church and town. One of his lectures, titled "Our National Troubles," was printed in the *Mercer County Whig*—an anti-slavery news paper.



Proceed north on Strawberry Alley, turn left onto Quince Alley, cross Route 19 into Shannon's Kandy Kitchen parking lot.

Stop #8: Former Site of First Presbyterian Church:

Shannon's Kandy Kitchen stands on the site of the Old First Presbyterian Church, built in the early 1800's. On June 15, 1835, a visiting pastor, the Reverend Dr. Nathaniel West, delivered a sermon supporting abolition. Following this fiery oratory, citizens formed the Mercer County Anti-Slavery Society on July 4. Reverend Samuel Tait, the first pastor of this church, was preparing his horse to take his family to church one Sunday morning in November 1838. In his Coolspring Township barn, he found a runaway slave. The evening before, a slave-catcher was about to enter Mercer with three escaped slaves. Their kidnapping occurred in Liberia—near Sandy Lake. The two female slaves freed their male companion, who fled into the woods. The slave-catcher lodged the women in the county jail and hired two bounty hunters to help him recapture his property. Tait, a member of the Mercer County Anti-Slavery Society, disguised the man with his own wig, hat, and cloak. Tait directed him to his house where the disguised man received food and protection. Rumor has it that Tait "lent" his horse to the man for his getaway and he was late to service that morning.

The Old Mercer Graveyard is located behind Shannon's Kandy Kitchen. Enjoy a stroll through this quaint cemetery. Amongst the silent roll call, you will find familiar names: Kilgore, Young, and, yes, Tait.



Return to Route 19; proceed left to Route 62 toward Stoneboro and Sandy Lake (lake & borough).

Stop #9: Freedom Road Cemetery:

This cemetery is located on the right across from the main gate at Stoneboro Fairgrounds. The cemetery is all that remains of Liberia, a fugitive slave town established by the Travis family, free African-Americans. For years, this community offered sanctuary to weary travelers. It was also the site of frequent raids by slave catchers. After the Fugitive Slave Act of 1849/50, most of the population fled to Canada to become legal free citizens. A few stayed in this area, one an entrepreneur who sold cigars and whiskey to his neighbors. Another person who stayed was "Auntie Strange." She was a runaway who was persistent enough to flee the South twice. The first time she was captured, beaten, and her fingers on the left hand chopped off. The second time, she gained her freedom.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: Please note the Pennsylvania Historical Marker for Freedom Road located on the right hand side of Route 62.



Proceed to Route 845, turn left to drive through Stoneboro, view Sandy Lake (a glacial kettle lake), and turn left onto Route 358 toward Greenville—crossing over Perry Highway—Route 19.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: Stop and visit the Stoneboro Area Historical Society (allow one-half hour). There is a private swim beach at Sandy Lake where for a small fee you can use the facilities. Fishing opportunities abound for licensed anglers in Mercer County.



Proceed on Route 358 to Greenville; turn right onto Route 58 toward Jamestown



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: Stop at the Greenville Historical Society (West Main Street) (allow 1 to 2 hours), Greenville Canal Museum (Alan Avenue) (allow 1 to 2 hours), and the Greenville Railroad Museum and Park (Main Street) (allow 1 to 2 hours). Enjoy downtown Greenville; it is on the National Register of Historic Places. On your way to the next stop, don't miss the GALSA sports complex, a short drive out of town on the left. In Jamestown, the Gibson House will be on the right about a block beyond the first traffic light.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: Before Jamestown, Pymatuning Deer Park is located on the right, a nice attraction for youngsters of any age.

Stop #10: Gibson House (or the Mark Twain Manor):



Dr. William Gibson, a prominent Jamestown physician, traveled with Samuel Clemens to Russia. Clemens wrote a book on their travels called *Innocents Abroad*. The house has been rumored to be a stop on the URR. In the basement, there is evidence of a small room with fixtures to chain fugitive slaves—much like the Johnston Tavern—to keep the slaves from the eyes of neighbors and strangers. Other rooms in the house, especially the room between the second and third floors, have this rumored Underground Railroad heritage. There is now a restaurant in this building. If it is open—and you ask nicely—you might be able to arrange a tour. The Jamestown Future Foundation owns the Gibson House, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.



WHILE YOU ARE HERE: Visit the Jamestown Historical Society (allow 1 to 2 hours), explore the Shenango River Corridor, or continue on to Pymatuning State Park.

This is the end of the Underground Railroad Driving Tour.