

The real nature of the
operation. the
underground



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The underground railroad was a network of northerners that helped slaves reached the north and Canada for safety from their plantation.

It was secret and railway terms were used to describe system as a way to hide the real nature of the operation. The underground railroad extended from Maine to Nebraska but was most concentrated in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indian, New York, and The New England States. More of the more specific spots were Detroit, Michigan, Erie, Pennsylvania, Buffalo and New York. The slaves and the people who housed the slaves spoke in a disguised language that was used words like " freight, lines, stations and conductors". Freight meant freed slaves, lines were routes, stopping places were stations and the people who helped the slaves along the way were the conductors. So that is basically how it got its name because it was related to a train and the purpose of the system was to get you from one place to another. The " Liberty Line" was another for the system. Help was given to the slaves from one transfer place to another ensuring the slaves journey to be safely executed.

Once a slave reached their final destination, Canada or New England they would still have to keep quiet about how they reached the north without being discovered. The people that were most into helping slaves escape by means of the railroad were northern abolitionists and other anti-slavery groups who disliked what was going on in the south. These included several Protestant especially Quakers, Methodists, and Mennonites. There was a Quaker of Thomas Garrett who was known for helping about 2, 700 slaves escape to freedom. Former slaves were also active rolls in the Underground Railroad. One of these was an important well known black slave named

Harriet Tumbman. Harriet was a runaway slave who helped many blacks escape and she became known as the “ Mosses of her people” She served in the civil war she served as a nurse, cook, scout, and spy. Most runaway slaves were young, male, unattached and highly skilled.

When the slaves travelled they travelled at night to avoid being seen by slave masters, people getting paid to find slaves, and most southerners who would report them for being spotted. When a slave travelled at night he/she would follow the North star as a guide in the right direction. In 1793 there was a law that was passed that said a run-away slave could be recaptured if caught. They tried to enforce this but because of the Yankee judges and legislators they conflicted with the outcome too much. The south got aggravated with the north and the whole slavery conflict was a major element in the Civil War. Life for a slave in the north was not free at all. The slaves were still discriminated and they could still be caught and brought back down to the south and harshly beaten or even killed. This is what lead many of the slaves to take off for Canada.

Once they had stayed in Canada for what they thought was a safe time, they would make their way back down to the New England area. Slaves were not to be educated. If a slave master were to find out a slave had been learning he would beat the slave. The slave masters didn't want their slaves to become intelligent. Many slaves would also try to read the bible; if caught they were punished. A way many slaves did learn was by passing the slaves down from one to another.

They could not have a school or anything like that. When a slave were to runaway from their plantation they would go at night and some even tried to go by horseback. Life as a slave was harsh and completely unfair. Luckily the northerners stood up for what they though was right and won.