



MORGAN COUNTY UNDERGROUND RAILROAD COMMITTEE

The purpose of the Underground Railroad Committee is to promote awareness of the Underground Railroad era in Morgan County by providing research and educational opportunities.

The UGRR Committee is a sub-committee of the Morgan County Historical Society that was organized in 2003. In less than six months of its formation, the Committee identified Woodlawn Farm as a UGRR site with great potential for education and local tourism. On December 29, 2003 the Committee, with the assistance of the Morgan County Historical Society, purchased Woodlawn Farm five miles east of town.

The UGRR Committee is continuing to develop the property into a living history museum which will not only celebrate the courage of those involved in the UGRR, but will also demonstrate what life was like on a farm in the middle of the 19th century.

The Committee also provides the education of Underground Railroad sites and their history through programs, events and tours.

For More Information on The Underground Railroad Committee, or to arrange tours of Woodlawn Farm:

www.woodlawnfarm.com
217.243.5678

www.facebook.com/jaxugrr/

Search *Woodlawn Farm*

Search *woodlawn.farm.historic.site*



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310 East State Street, Jacksonville, IL 62650
217.243.5678 or 800.593.5678

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UNDERGROUND RAILROAD



Your guide to the
history and sites of the
**Underground
Railroad**
around Jacksonville, Illinois

ABOUT THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NEAR JACKSONVILLE, ILLINOIS

In the mid-1800s, Jacksonville, Illinois acted as a local hub for the Underground Railroad, sheltering hundreds who wished to escape the horrors of slavery. Several local historic homes served as havens on this journey to freedom, making Jacksonville one of the first such stations in the area.

Proud, educated abolitionists like Jonathan B. Turner and Edward Beecher, brother to Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom's Cabin, proved to be invaluable advocates for freedom. Edward Beecher was the first president of Illinois College, the first private college in Illinois. Because of the strong views of many of the students and faculty, Illinois College was considered an engine of abolitionism. Benjamin Henderson, a former slave, came to Jacksonville in 1841 and immediately began working with the Underground Railroad. These men and countless others kept the spirited torch of freedom burning bright.

The UGRR was neither a railroad nor underground. It was a series of safe places where abolitionists helped runaways, "freedom seekers," find an escape from slavery. Networks existed across the United States, to help move people into areas of the country where they could find freedom.

In Jacksonville we have at least 9 documented sites which were important to this endeavor during the years before the Civil War. Most are private residences still available to be seen and their stories told. This guide has been created to help you appreciate and understand the rich historic sites that exist here in the Jacksonville and Morgan County area.

We hope you will use this information as the beginning of your understanding of this important part of our history.

1 THE FORMER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

520 W. College Avenue



On December 15, 1833 thirty-two men and women founded the Jacksonville Congregational Church. They were all anti-slavery in belief and the church was soon called “the Abolition Church,” not always a compliment in the divided community of Jacksonville. When the UGRR became active in town, Deacon Elihu Wolcott was known as the “chief conductor.”

Many members of this church bravely risked prison and fines by actively providing shelter, clothing, food and transportation. The Congregational Church is recognized by the National Park Service, National UGRR Network to Freedom program.

2 BEECHER HALL

Illinois College Campus

Illinois College was founded in 1829 by the “Yale Band,” a group of Yale theology graduates who left Connecticut to found churches and a college on the Western frontier. These young men were all opposed to slavery.

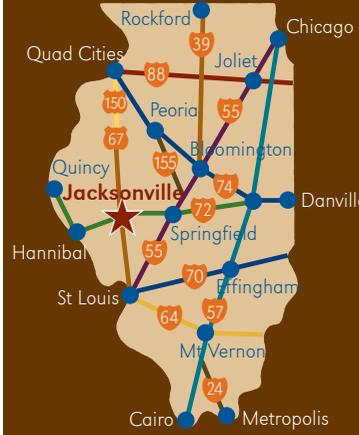


The Rev. Edward Beecher, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, was named the first president. He was a good friend of the Rev. Elijah Lovejoy and together they founded the first Illinois Antislavery Society in Alton. After Lovejoy’s tragic death the students held a massive protest near Beecher Hall. Students, professors and trustees of the College all were active in the UGRR. Beecher Hall and Illinois College are recognized by the National Park Service, National UGRR Network to Freedom program.



Come to Jacksonville!

The city is only 25 minutes west of Springfield on Interstate 72, and 2 hours north of St. Louis on Rt 67.



3 WOODLAWN FARM

1463 Gierke Road

Follow Morton Avenue east over Route 72, underneath railroad underpass, to Arnold Rd. Turn left and follow the signs to Gierke Rd.



This farm was settled in 1824 by Michael Huffaker and his wife from Kentucky. Michael employed four free African-American families for whom he provided cabins. In 1840 he built the home which still stands on the property. People were used to seeing blacks working on the farm and didn’t suspect that this was a safe house for “freedom seekers.”

4 DR. BAZALEEL GILLETT HOUSE

1005 Grove Street

This home was purchased by Dr. Gillett in 1838. Construction began in 1833 and was finished by Dr. Gillett shortly after buying it. He was a physician who helped during the cholera epidemic of 1833. He also helped to found Trinity Episcopal Church and was one of the trustees of the Female Academy which merged with Illinois College in 1903. As an abolitionist he allowed “freedom seekers” to hide in an abandoned



cabin on his 10 acres of land. One story tells of three women who were hiding in the shed and were rescued by Professor Jonathan Baldwin Turner of Illinois College.

5 ASA TALCOTT HOUSE

859 Grove Street

This was the home of Asa and Marie Talcott, founding members of the Congregational Church. The home was built 1833, with additions in 1844 and 1861. Asa Talcott was also a bricklayer and plasterer. Benjamin Henderson, a free black man and important conductor of the UGRR, stated that Asa Talcott was among those he could count on for help whenever he needed supplies for the fugitives.



One story of a fleeing slave in February 1844 states that a slave was put in a hay stack of Talcott’s barn, while authorities searched for the fugitive.

6 HENRY IRVING HOUSE

711 West Beecher Avenue

Henry Irving moved to Jacksonville in 1842 and was an active member of the Congregational Church.



His obituary from the Jacksonville Daily Journal states: “For a number of years after he came to this city he had the honor to belong to the brave band of Abolitionists who did so much to help fugitive slaves to freedom...His house was more than once a refuge to the freedom seekers.”

7 AFRICA IN JACKSONVILLE

In the 1800s most of Jacksonville’s African-American population lived in the area of town known as Africa. The area was bordered by W. Beecher Avenue (then known as College St.), S. West St., Anna St. and S. Church St. Here lived Ben Henderson, famous for his work in the UGRR and Rev. Andrew W. Jackson, pastor of Mt. Emory Baptist Church. In 1860 Africa had 156 residents. Many were former slaves who helped shelter “freedom seekers” on their way north.

8 GENERAL GRIERSON MANSION

852 E. State Street



Garrison Berry owned a small brick home which originally stood on this property. One night he provided shelter for Emily Logan, who had escaped from her owner, Mrs. Porter

Clay. The property was later purchased by the Grierson family and the original brick house was incorporated into the mansion. Benjamin H. Grierson, a general during the Civil War, later commanded the all black 10th U.S. Cavalry known as the Buffalo Soldiers.

9 PORTER CLAY HOUSE

1019 W. State Street

The home was built in 1834 on six acres of land owned by Elizabeth Hardin Clay who had married Porter Clay, a brother of Henry Clay. She came from Kentucky with two of her slaves, Emily and Robert Logan.



After living awhile in Jacksonville, the young people learned that Illinois was a free state. Fearing that Mrs. Clay would send them back into slavery, they fled the home and hid with friends in Africa (site #7). Robert was recaptured and sent back south while Emily was hidden by friends in the Congregational Church until her freedom was granted by the Supreme Court (sites #1 & #8).