



## THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

The Underground Railroad meant freedom for thousands of enslaved people from the South. The Underground Railroad was not a real railroad. It was the name given to the route of roads, homes and towns used to help freedom seekers leave their enslavers. Many enslaved people escaped to the northern United States and Canada where they could be free. Some enslaved people came to Michigan through Kentucky.

Escaping was dangerous. If captured, enslaved people would often be harshly punished. Some people who made it to “free states,” worked to help others escape through the Underground Railroad. They kept the routes they took secret. Freedom seekers traveled by foot, horse, train, or even fancy carriages. They sometimes wore disguises and used railroad code words like “station” and “conductor.”

In most towns in southern Michigan, there were “conductors,” or people who helped protect those escaping enslavement. Enslaved people hid in homes or barns during the day. They called these places “stations.” At night, they went to a station in the next town. Some people went to Canada, and some chose to stay in Michigan.

### The Crosswhites

Adam Crosswhite and his family escaped enslavement in Kentucky and settled near Marshall, Michigan in Calhoun County. Adam feared that slave patrols from Kentucky might come to Michigan to take him and his family back. He told his neighbors of a signal he would use in case of danger. The signal was a shot fired from a gun.

One morning in 1847, the neighbors heard the signal and ran to his house. At the door were four Kentucky men. They had come to take the Crosswhites back. A group of one-hundred Black and white neighbors gathered at the house. They stopped the Kentuckians while Adam, his wife and their four children escaped by train to Detroit and then to Canada.

The Kentuckians were angry, and they even went to court. The people from Marshall were charged with keeping the Kentuckians from taking back their “legal property.” The Marshall people had to pay money to the slave owners. But the Crosswhites were safe in Canada.

In 1850, the United States passed the Fugitive Slave Act. This law strengthened an existing law that made it illegal for people to help enslaved people escape and allowed slave patrols to go to free states to find freedom seekers. Many people in Michigan disagreed with this law, so in 1855 Michigan passed another law that said state and local officials, like police, could not help slave patrols. The Underground Railroad ended when the Civil War started in 1861.