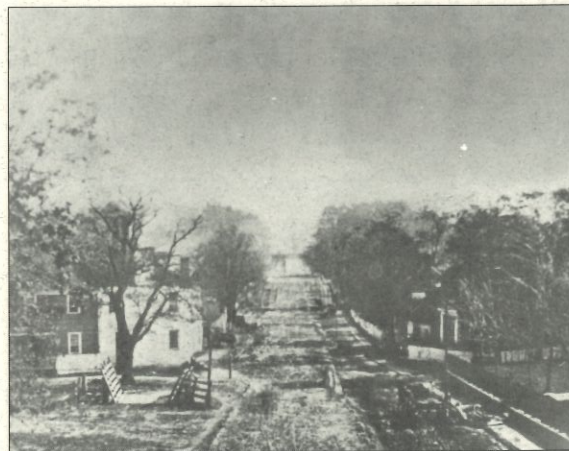


Rockville, Maryland, before the Civil War was a small Southern town (365 residents in 1860), a crossroads of major routes surrounded by fields and woods. Most slaves worked alongside their masters on small farms or were hired out. Slaves were sold at the **Montgomery County Courthouse** (*below*) even as runaways turned roads such as

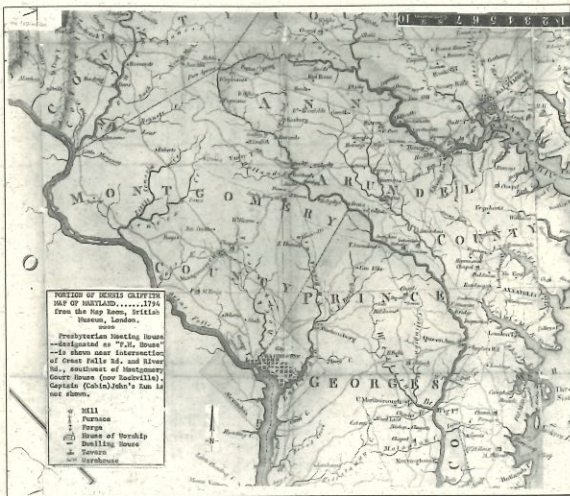


Charles Brewer collection, Peerless Rockville

the **Rockville Pike** and local waterways into paths to freedom. Newspapers and official documents as well as oral tradition provide evidence of Underground Railroad activity in Rockville (*below*, 1864-72).



Charles Brewer collection, Peerless Rockville



Montgomery County Historical Society

Maryland (*above*, 1794), sometimes called the Middle Ground, remained in the Union during the Civil War, but it was a slaveholding state with most local citizens supporting the Southern cause. It is no surprise then to find a statue honoring Confederate soldiers near the Red Brick Courthouse or to learn that Rockville's citizens included abolitionists, slaveholders, Unionists—some of them slave owners—and secessionists. Until the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, crossing the Mason-Dixon line (along the border of Maryland and Pennsylvania 90 miles north of Rockville) meant freedom.

Ongoing research continues to reveal new facets of the story of Rockville's people and places on the Underground Railroad.

The Underground Railroad: Rockville People and Places



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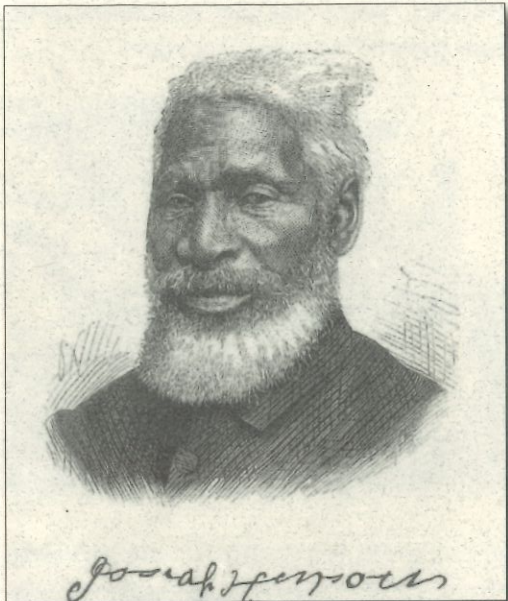
Funding from the Heritage Tourism Alliance
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The Underground Railroad: Rockville People and Places



Henson, Uncle Tom's Story of His Life

The Underground Railroad
—a secret network of volunteers who transported, concealed, fed, and clothed fleeing slaves—helped countless numbers of freedom-seekers make their way north. From the early 1800s to the Civil War, Maryland played a leading role in this movement, with Montgomery County as an active hub and Rockville serving as a station.

The Underground Railroad: Rockville People and Places

Around 1794, **Adam Robb**, a local tavern keeper, bought a small child named **Josiah Henson**. When the boy became ill, he was sent to his mother, a slave on the **Riley plantation** (*below*) a few miles south of Rockville. Henson was such a capable man that for many years he ran Isaac Riley's farm.

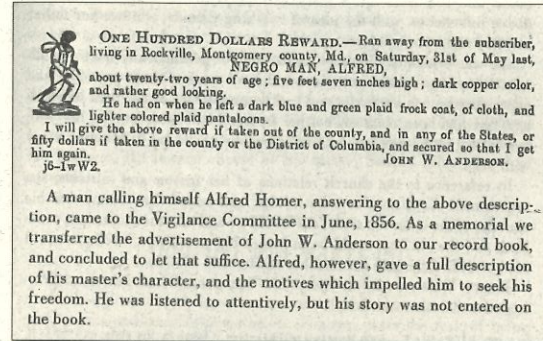


Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

After an unsuccessful attempt to buy his freedom, Henson escaped from Kentucky, taking his wife and four children to Canada. There he became a leader of a free black community, an abolitionist and Underground Railroad conductor, and the author of an 1849 autobiography that inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe as she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. In this popular novel that created enormous support for abolition, Stowe used Henson, a devout minister, as the model for the lead character in her novel, bringing him fame that lasts today.

William Still, an Underground Railroad operator in Philadelphia, in 1872 published *The Underground Rail Road*, a primary source for many tales of daring escapes from the South, including Rockville. Among them is the account of **Alfred Homer**, age 22,

who in 1856 left his master, **Dr. John Anderson**, of Washington Street, who ran the ad below. Homer was typical of fugitives—young, strong, and capable—the sort of person a slaveholder would hate to lose.



Still, The Underground Rail Road

Slaves seeking freedom and those assisting them used a wide range of strategies and routes. Still wrote of **Ann Maria Weems** (*below*), a teenager held in Rockville who escaped dressed as a coachman in 1855. Baptized at St. Mary's Catholic Church, she likely worshipped in the slave gallery upstairs. The *Montgomery County Sentinel*, then published at the corner of Washington Street and Montgomery Avenue, ran reward notices for Weems, Homer, and others.



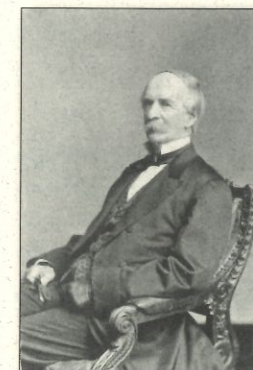
Still, The Underground Rail Road

Rockville citizens displayed a tremendous variation of attitudes and behaviors, even among slaveholders. Adam Robb died in 1848 leaving approximately 30 slaves to his daughters, **Jane Beall** and **Catherine Harding**. Jane and her daughters, who lived at what

is now the **Beall-Dawson House** (*below*), appear to have treated their slaves well. There is no record of them fleeing, and the only one known to be sold was an elderly man whose freedom was purchased by his brother. In contrast, the Hardings sometimes split slave families through sales, providing one of the strongest motivations for escape, and several of their people fled.



Oral tradition points to other local Underground Railroad activity. According to church lore, a crawl space in the cellar under **Christ Episcopal Church** was a hiding spot for runaways. While that may never be confirmed, both slaveholders and abolitionists worshipped and served together on the vestry. One of them, **Richard Johns Bowie** (*below*), who with his wife, Catherine, relied on more than 20 slaves to operate Glenview farm, tried a variety of strategies to keep Maryland from seceding and slaves in the possession of their masters. A staunch Unionist, Bowie was briefly captured by JEB Stuart's cavalry in 1863.



Montgomery County Historical Society

Walking Tour

"In Their Steps"

Explore the many facets of Rockville's Underground Railroad. **Information:** peerlessrockville.org or 301-762-0096

Additional Sites to Visit

Glenview Mansion, Baltimore Road

Home of Catherine and Richard Johns Bowie

Rockville Cemetery, Baltimore Road

Burial ground for white residents, many mentioned in this brochure, 1752-present

Rock Creek

Common escape route through Montgomery County

Haiti Neighborhood and Cemetery, Martin's Lane

Home to free blacks and emancipated slaves and 1860 house continuously occupied by one family freed by the Bealls

Josiah Henson Historic Site, Old Georgetown Road

Home of Josiah Henson for nearly 30 years, opening to the public in 2010

Suggested Reading

Bordewich, Fergus M. *Bound for Canaan* (2005)

Carbone, Elisa. *Stealing Freedom* (1998)

Cohen, Anthony. *The Underground Railroad in Montgomery County, Maryland* (1994) and *The Montgomery County Story*: 38-1, 49-1 (1995, 2006)

Henson, Josiah. *The Life of Josiah Henson* (1849)

McGuckian, Eileen. *Rockville: Portrait of a City* (2001)

Still, William. *The Underground Rail Road* (1872)

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)

For more information on the Underground Railroad, visit the research libraries at Peerless Rockville (301-762-0096) and the Montgomery County Historical Society (301-340-2974).