

## History

Written by Administrator  
Monday, 29 September 2008 01:02 -

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Woodlawn Farm, from the Morgan County Atlas of 1872.

**In the mid 1800s, Jacksonville acted as a the hub for 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 and by far the busiest.**

**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 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 on the Underground Railroad. These men and countless others kept the spirited torch of freedom burning bright aboard the Underground Railroad.**

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Authentic Replica of Slave Restraint

**The Underground Railroad was not a real railroad nor was it underground. It was a network of secret routes and antislavery believers who assisted the runaway slaves--or freedom seekers--as they followed the North Star to safety. Conductors assisted freedom seekers providing safe refuge, clothing, food, transportation and friendship. Such persons risked fines, imprisonment, and personal safety. Because of the danger, the routes and activity had to be kept secret.**

**Many of the freedom seekers coming to Jacksonville were from St. Louis. Benjamin Henderson and David Spencer were two free black men living in Jacksonville who did most of the driving. Elihu Wolcott, a deacon in the Congregational Church, was considered the Conductor-in-Chief of this endeavor and he was assisted by many brave men and women. African American freedom seekers began coming through Jacksonville in the late 1830s and continued until the 1860's with the beginning of the Civil War. We will never know how many were helped to freedom nor do we know the names of all who helped nor all of the sites that were used in helping them on their way. But those we do know, we celebrate and cherish as part of a shining moment of courage and principle in American history.**

**In 1990 legislation was introduced in Congress by Representative Kostmayer and Senator Paul Simon to study ways of commemorating the UGRR. On November 28, 1990 this Act, Public Law 101-628, was enacted. In 1998 Public Law 105-203 directed the National Park Service to establish the Network to Freedom project which tracks the UGRR routes throughout the country and which supports the preservation and educational uses of the many known underground railroad sites.**

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**The UGRR Committee of the Morgan County Historical Society has applied for NPS recognition for several of our sites in Morgan County. We are researching other sites and will apply for recognition for these as well. We recently learned that the Congregational Church has been accepted and will be listed on the Network to Freedom website. The committee hopes to have more of our current sites recognized in the near future.**

**[CLICK HERE FOR THE HISTORY OF UGRR QUILTS](#)**