For the People
A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association
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Lincoln’s Springfield
The Underground Railroad

By Richard E. Hart

For a number of years I have been curious about the possible presence of the Underground Railroad in Lincoln’s Springfield. As a child on Sunday afternoon drives west of Springfield, my parents pointed out the small village of Farmingdale and told me that there had once been an Underground Railroad station there. I later learned that in the nineteenth century, Farmingdale was known as Farmington and that indeed its reputation as an active station on the Underground Railroad could be documented.

The story of the Underground Railroad at Farmington began on October 25, 1833, when a colony of fifty-two New Englanders, many of them abolitionists, arrived at Springfield after a ten-week journey from St. Lawrence County in upstate New York. The Sangamo Journal reported on their arrival: “Emigrants are coming by thousands into Illinois and from all quarters of the Union. On Friday last fifteen large wagons from St. Lawrence County, N. York, loaded with emigrants, arrived in our village, and drove up in front of the market house, in grand style. These emigrants had been about ten weeks on the journey, and enjoyed good health during the time. They design to settle in Sangamo County—to which we bid them welcome.”

The day following their Springfield arrival, the colony moved eight miles west to the Sangamon River village of Sangamo Town. They spent the winter there and in the spring moved a few miles west to an open prairie where they settled, purchased farmland, and established the community of Farmington.

The colony was representative of the New England strain of early Illinois settlers who in the 1830s and 1840s settled in a random pattern of dots across the central and northern Illinois prairies. Their customs and culture contrasted sharply with that of the earlier settlers in Central Illinois, who had come from the upland South. In addition to being farmers, some of them were teachers, ministers, abolitionists, and conductors on the Underground Railroad. In September 1837 seventeen men of the colony expressed their strong opposition to slavery by signing Elijah P. Lovejoy’s call for Illinois’ first antislavery convention to be held at Upper Alton on October 26. Four of the Farmington signers attended the convention. At least four of the colony, Dr. John Lyman, Stephen Child, Luther Ransom, and Reverend Billious Pond, and several of their neighbors, Jay Slater and Reverend Thomas Galt, became active conductors on the Underground Railroad at the Farmington station.

In 1841 Samuel Willard, a twenty-year-old Jacksonville, Illinois, abolitionist, had his first experience in assisting a runaway slave move north on the underground railroad. Willard’s written account of that adventure, “My First Adventure with a Fugitive Slave: The Story of It and How It Failed,” acknowledged that he was not familiar with the Farmington station on the Underground Railroad at that time. “It seemed to my father [Julius] that the easiest thing for us would be to take her [the fugitive slave] to some one on the line of what was known as the Under-Ground Rail-Road. But we knew nothing about it. In later adventures of this sort we went direct to what was then called Farmington, now Farmingdale, near Springfield... My father, as well as myself, helped many fugitives afterwards.”

Two years later, Willard, who was then a student at Illinois College, successfully assisted a fugitive slave move along the Underground Railroad from Jacksonville to Farmington. His written account, “My Second Adventure with a Fugitive Slave: And How It was Won,” told of secreting runaway slave Jack out of Jacksonville and on to the Farmington underground railroad station.

A few days later the conductors of the Under-Ground R.R. were ready. Lewis knew the way to Laurie’s so I went with him one night to take the negro over the next stage. We had to come back to the Movastar bridge, and then to take an oblique course across fields thru groves and thickets to a certain school-house a mile or more east of the town, on the old railroad track and near the high road to Springfield. On the way Jack sighed and said, “it’s a long way to Canada!” We assented. Once a little noise in the bush near us startled him: out came his pistol and I heard the click of the cocking. When we struck the railroad, we were near the rendezvous: there were my father [Julius A. Willard] and [William] Chauncey Carter on horses, leading a third horse for the negro: he was soon mounted and the trio were on the way to Farmington; while two over-tired men trudged back to College, but I had to meet my classes next day as usual.

As a result of this activity, Samuel was arrested and charged with assisting in the escape of a runaway slave. His case went to the Supreme Court and continued on page 4
Lincoln Birthday Events Culminate with Doris Kearns Goodwin Address

The Abraham Lincoln Association celebrated the 197th anniversary of Lincoln’s birth in grand fashion. The theme of the symposium was “The Lincoln Family,” with thought-provoking papers from Catherine Clinton, Daniel Mark Epstein, and Joshua Wolf Shenk, and commentary from Gerald Prokopowicz. Lincoln curator Kim Matthew Bauer presided over the symposium for the final time as he leaves for a position as Lincoln heritage coordinator for the city of Decatur, Illinois, where he resides. Paper topics included “Wife v. Widow: Clashing Perspectives on Mary Lincoln’s Legacy,” “The Road to Washington, 1847,” and “Lincoln’s Emotional Life.” Doris Kearns Goodwin, the banquet speaker, spent most of February 11 and 12 signing copies of her best-selling book, Team of Rivals. She graciously signed every copy presented to her and even took the time for photographs. Throughout the course of the two days it is estimated she signed over eight hundred books. Her banquet address was drawn from her book in which she detailed how Lincoln’s abilities and character outshined those of his fellow Republican rivals for the 1860 presidency.

Mark your calendar now for the 2007 events. The symposium theme is “Lincoln in the 1850s,” and the banquet speaker will be Newsweek columnist Jon Meacham, author of the recent book American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation.
President’s Message

By Richard E. Hart

February 12, 2006, will be remembered as one of ALA’s most popular celebrations of Lincoln’s birth. Doris Kearns Goodwin arrived in Springfield on Saturday evening and began a whirlwind of speaking engagements and signings of her best selling book, Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln. On Sunday afternoon prior to the Symposium, Doris signed her book at the Old State Capitol. Admirers arrived early and formed a line from the first floor, up the grand stairs, around the second floor rotunda, and into the room where Doris was gracious to every signature seeker. So not to interfere with the Symposium, Doris and her team of fans moved down the street to the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum where she finished the signings. It is estimated that she signed well over eight hundred books.

Symposium attendees packed the chamber of the House of Representatives in the Old State Capitol where Kim Bauer welcomed Catherine Clinton, Daniel Epstein, and Joshua Shenk. They each presented thought-provoking glimpses into the lives of Mary and Abraham. Gerald Prokopowicz’s comments were insightful.

On Sunday evening the banquet was a sell-out. After dinner and before Doris began to speak, Georgia Northrup was able to squeeze a few more waiting-list people into the center aisle of the banquet hall. Doris’s speech confirmed her reputation as a master storyteller. She attributes that skill to her father. As a young girl Doris lived in Brooklyn, New York. While her father was off at work during the summers, he required Doris to listen to the radio broadcasts of the Brooklyn Dodger baseball games. At the end of the work day when her father returned home, Doris would give him a play-by-play recount of the afternoon game. Years later Doris continued to hone her skills on many a summer afternoon at Boston’s Fenway Park by telling her three sons about their grandfather, who died before the boys got to know him.

The ALA has two big events in the near future. In 2008, we will celebrate the one-hundredth anniversary of the Abraham Lincoln Association, and in 2009 we will participate in the national celebration of Lincoln’s two-hundredth birthday. The ALA’s Bicentennial Committee has started planning for both events and the preliminary plans are exciting. If you have any thoughts or ideas on how to best celebrate these important events, please e-mail them to me at rhart1213@aol.com. If you prefer the mail, you can write to me c/o Abraham Lincoln Association, 1 Old State Capitol Plaza, Springfield, IL 62701.

We all thank our past President, Roger Bridges for his service not only as President, but also for more than three decades of Abraham Lincoln Association leadership. Roger was present at the beginning of the Symposium and was responsible for its formative years.

I look forward to being your President during these exciting days and welcome your continued participation and support. Please feel free to contact me at any time to offer your ideas and suggestions. The best is yet to come.

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he eventually plead guilty and was fined $1.00. In a later written reminiscence, Willard identified Reverend Bilious Pond, Dr. John Lyman, and Luther Ransom as among his active allies on the Sangamon County Underground Railroad. Helen Blankmeyer’s 1935 history, *The Sangamon Country*, contains a brief account of the Underground Railroad and also identifies the conductors at the Farmington station. “In Sangamon county there were at least two of these [Underground Railroad] stations near Farmingdale. Dr. John Lyman and a few of his neighbors (including Jay Slater, Stephen Child, Luther Ransom, Rev. Billious Pond, Rev. Gault, and probably others), agreed to help each other hide any slaves brought to them, and to take them further on their way to freedom.”

So who were these men that Willard and Blankmeyer deemed conductors on the Underground Railroad at Farmington?

Dr. John Lyman, a New England doctor, was born on April 2, 1780, at Lebanon, New Hampshire. He married there to Martha Storrs and attended medical lectures at Dartmouth College. He practiced medicine in New Haven Township, Vermont, and during the War of 1812, was an Army surgeon. In 1824, John moved with his family to Potsdam, New York, and in 1833, came to Farmington with the colony of fifty-two. John signed the call for and attended Elijah Lovejoy’s 1837 antislavery convention at Upper Alton. On February 26, 1839, *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, an abolitionist newspaper published at Hennepin, Illinois, reported that John Lyman was one of five Sangamon County delegates to the Illinois Anti-Slavery Society annual meeting.

A neighbor described “Dr. Lyman’s Underground Depot” at Farmington: “Down the hill near the road and near the branch, he [Lyman] had a little shanty, and a family of darkies living in it. It had the name of Dr. Lyman’s Under-ground Depot. He was accused of secreting run-away slaves, on their way to Canada. It was said that the southern slave holders offered a thousand dollars for the Dr.’s scalp.”

Jay Slater, a farmer, was born on February 25, 1795, in Massachusetts. He was married on March 12, 1826, in Sangamon County, to Lucretia Carman, who was born in 1806 in New York. Slater was a conductor on the Underground Railroad and his home, a small, neat brick house that still stands just a short distance from Farmington, was most likely an active station on the Underground Railroad. Stephen Child, a farmer and teacher, was a New Englander, born on June 12, 1802, in Waitsfield, Vermont. In 1820 Child moved to Potsdam, New York, where he taught school. He married Lyman’s daughter, Hannah, and they had two children while living in Potsdam. Child and his family came to Sangamon County in 1833 as a part of the colony of fifty-two and settled near Farmington. Child was a conductor on the Underground Railroad who helped hundreds of runaway slaves move north from the Farmington station. John Carroll Powers’s 1876 *Early Settlers of Sangamon County* described Child:

Mr. [Stephen] Child was a farmer and teacher all his life. He was an original abolitionist, and as an agent of the under-
Pond and his son, Marvin, were conductors on the Underground Railroad. On June 11, 1845, Abraham Lincoln appeared in the Menard County Circuit Court as an attorney for Marvin Pond, who had been indicted for harboring a slave. The jury found him not guilty.

Thomas Galt, a Presbyterian minister, was born on September 12, 1805, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. He was educated at Jefferson College in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, and at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania. In 1834 he was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Ohio, and shortly thereafter married Sarah Happer. In the spring of 1835 they moved west to Peoria, Illinois, where Galt preached for a few months, and in the autumn of that year moved to Springfield. On April 10, 1836, he became the first pastor of the Farmingdale Presbyterian Church. The Galts lived one mile east of Farmington where they set apart three acres of ground for a church and a cemetery, now the Farmington Cemetery. Galt signed the call for and attended Elijah Lovejoy’s 1837 anti-slavery convention at Upper Alton. He was also one of five Sangamon County delegates to the 1839 Illinois Anti-Slavery Society annual meeting.

Galt remained pastor at Farmington until April 1842, when the Farmington Presbyterian Church split over the issue of slavery. The “Old School” advocates, who wanted a slow resolution of the slavery issue, retained control of the Farmington church. Galt, a “New School” advocate who wanted the immediate abolition of slavery, resigned his pastorate, and in July 1842 became pastor of the Center Presbyterian Church, a “New School” Presbyterian church. Sangamon County’s first antislavery convention was held at Center Church.

Coming back to Springfield from those Sunday afternoon drives, I imagined runaway slaves being taken in and hidden at Farmington and then transported in the dead of night to the next stop on the Underground Railroad. How noble these people were to risk their all for the freedom of another soul and how brave the runaway slaves were to risk their lives to escape slavery. I wondered if there was anyone in Springfield, just eight miles east, who shared this nobility. Was there an Underground Railroad station in Springfield? If so, who were the conductors and where were the stations located? Was Lincoln aware of its presence?

Perfect answers to these questions will probably never be given. Success of the Underground Railroad rested upon a strict code of secrecy and it is difficult to find primary source materials on the Underground Railroad. The name of one underground conductor was often not known to the next conductor along the line. Because of the secrecy, the Underground Railroad’s presence in Lincoln’s Springfield has been shrouded in mystery.

Over the years, I have collected information that refers to Springfield’s Underground Railroad. It is often a serendipitous experience as I will find something while researching an unrelated topic. When these random findings are pasted together, a picture emerges that leads one to the conclusion that there was an active Underground Railroad system in Springfield from at least 1841 until after Lincoln’s departure in 1861. The Springfield stations had a close connection with those at Farmington. One station existed near the Globe Tavern at the time that newly married Abraham and Mary Lincoln lived there in 1841. In the 1850s at least two stations were close to the Lincoln home at Eighth and Jackson. These two stations and two others not as close to the Lincoln home were operated by African Americans who knew and had close contacts with Lincoln. Lincoln must have known of the Underground Railroad activities of these African American friends. Yes, there were a few noble souls in Lincoln’s Springfield who conducted an active Underground Railroad system.

Luther N. Ransom

Luther N. Ransom was born about 1800 in Clinton County, New York. He and his wife, Zerviah, and two children came to Farmington in 1833 with the colony of fifty-two. Luther was Clerk of Session of the Farmington Presbyterian Church from 1834 to 1835. In 1835 Luther sold his property at Farmington and moved eight miles south of Springfield to what is now Chatham. Here he purchased twenty-one hundred acres, laid out the town of Chatham, built a house, organized Chatham Presbyterian Church and hired an abolitionist preacher. Luther appears to have envisioned a New England town on the prairie.

Luther was an early abolitionist. He signed Elijah Lovejoy’s 1837 call for an antislavery convention at Upper Alton, Illinois, and attended that convention in October 1837. He was also one of five Sangamon County delegates to the 1839 Illinois Anti-Slavery Society annual meeting. John Carroll Powers’s 1876 Early Settlers of Sangamon County, described Luther thus: “He was an original abolitionist, an uncompromising temperance man, scrupulously honest in his dealings, and it was believed by those who knew him well, that he was honest and conscientious in all he did. His erratic course was regarded more as the manifestations of an unsettled mind than of a depraved disposition.”

In 1840 Luther moved to Springfield, and by October 18, 1841, he operated an Underground Railroad station there at his boarding house near the Globe Tavern. A. P. Powers’s participation in Springfield’s underground railroad is evidenced by the St. Louis slave owner’s October 18, 1841, handbill offering a $200 reward for the return of an African American woman, Rittea or Henrietta Jones, and her children, Martha, age six, Sarah, age four, and James, age two, and her husband, Nicholas, a “free dark mulatto.” A “P.S.” at the end of the handbill stated that Rittea and her family were “seen at L. N. Ransom’s boarding house, at Springfield Ill., on yesterday morning.”

Samuel Willard remembered that in 1843 Luther, “noted as a very strenuous abolitionist,” advised his father, continued on page 6
Lincoln’s Springfield
The Underground Railroad

*Part 2, which will include more stories of those involved in Springfield’s Underground Railroad, will appear in the summer issue of For the People.*


3The Farmington signers were: Peter Bates, Asahel Stone, Azel Lyman, Alvan Lyman, Harooldus Estabrook, Ezra Lyman, Bishop Seely, B. B. More, Jay Slater, H. P. Lyman, Oliver Bates, Stephen Child, O. L. Stone, A. S. Lyman, Joel Buckman, John Lyman, and T. Galt.

4The Farmington attendees at the first Illinois antislavery convention held at Upper Alton on October 26, 1837, were: C. [Cornelius] Lyman, John Lyman, L. [Luther] N. Ransom and Thos. Galt.

5Doctor Samuel Willard was born on December 30, 1821, in Lunenburg, Essex County, Vermont. On the night of November 7, 1837, he witnessed some of the events around the proslavery mob killing of Elijah P. Lovejoy. Henry Tanner, The Martyrdom of Lovejoy. An Account of the Life, Trials and Perils of Rev. Elijah P. Lovejoy, Who Was Killed by a Pro-Slavery Mob, at Alton, Ill., on the Night of November 7, 1837. By an Eye-Witness (Chicago: Fergus Printing Co., 1881). Samuel contributed several pages to Tanner’s book. Samuel and his father, Julius A. Willard, were charged with assisting in the escape of a fugitive at Jacksonville, in 1843, while Samuel was a student in Illinois College. “The National Corporation Reporter,” gave an account of this affair, together with a letter from Samuel, in which he states that, after protracted litigation, during which the case was carried to the Supreme Court, it was ended by his pleading guilty before Judge Samuel D. Lockwood, when he was fined one dollar and costs. He enlisted in the Illinois Ninety-seventh Infantry Regiment on September 5, 1862, and acted as the surgeon for the regiment. He resided in Springfield, Illinois, from October 1863 to September 1870, when he moved to Chicago. Doctor Samuel Willard died on February 9, 1913, in Chicago, Illinois. Kim Torp, trans., The Underground Railroad, Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois, 1901, http://genealogytrails.com/ill/underground-road.html.


7William Chauncy Carter was born in New Canaan, Connecticut, on April 2, 1820, and died in Jacksonville, Illinois, on December 9, 1896. At age thirteen William was brought by his parents to Illinois. In the spring of 1834 the family located on a farm about four miles south of Jacksonville,

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Whence his father had purchased eighty acres. William graduated from Illinois College in 1845. For four years, he farmed and taught school near Jacksonville during the winter. He purchased a farm and spent his active life farming. William’s barn was an Underground Railroad station. Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of Morgan County (Chicago: Munsell Publishing Co., 1906).

Willard, “My Second Adventure with a Fugitive Slave: And How It was Won,” TS, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.


The house may be reached by going west on Route 97 (Jefferson Street) from Springfield to Bradfordton; two miles from the intersection of Jefferson Street and Veterans Parkway. At Bradfordton, continue west for one mile on Route 97 to the first road on the right (north), Lincoln Trail. The intersection of Lincoln Trail and Route 97 is marked as 5.5 West and 1.95 North, being the distance from the intersection of First and Washington streets in Springfield. Turn right on Lincoln Trail and go one mile north. The house sits back on the left (west) side of the road.

Mary E. Stone, “Communicant Register of Farmington-Farmingdale United Presbyterian Church,” TS, 82, Sangamon Valley Collection.


Ibid., 259; Power, 576–77. Marvin B. Pond, born on November 3, 1807, in New York, married there and came to Sangamon County in 1837. In 1839 he moved to Menard County, where he died in July 1871.

Genius of Universal Emancipation.


Stone, 69.

Genius of Universal Emancipation.

Power, 593.


The handbill is in the Henry Horner Collection, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library.

$200  
REWARD  
Ran off from the subscriber on Thursday morning, 14th inst, one Negro Woman, named Rittea or Henrietta Jones, with her three children, Martha, Sarah and James. The woman is large and fleshy, of a dark complexion and very sullen countenance; the oldest daughter, Martha is six
Said Nicholas had a white man at Alton, to and quite impertinent when spoken to. Smallpox, about 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, five years old, slightly spotted with the horse box wagon, covered with white linen carry his family to Carlinville Ill. in a two horse box wagon, covered with white linen or cotton.

I will give One hundred dollars for the delivery of Nicholas in St. Louis, if taken out of the State, or fifty dollars if apprehended in it, or the latter sum if confined in any Jail in the United States, so that I can get him. I will also give One hundred dollars for the delivery of Rittea and her children in St. Louis, if taken out of this State, or fifty dollars if apprehended in it, or the latter sum if confined in any Jail in the United States so that I can get them. In addition to the above reward all reasonable expenses will be paid by me.

St. Louis, Mo.
JOHN FINNLY.

P. S. Since the above was written I have been informed that Nicholas, his wife and three children were seen at L. N. Ransom’s boarding house, at Springfield Ill., on yesterday morning.

Springfield, October 18th, 1841.

On May 18, 1843, Abraham Lincoln wrote a letter to Joshua F. Speed, part of which addressed business matters. In explaining his attempts to collect on a debt owed Speed, Lincoln reported that the debt was to be paid from all rent due a Mr. Jewett after the previous January 12. Lincoln wrote: “The rent is for the house Ransom did live in just above the Globe [the Globe Tavern where the Lincoln’s then lived].” The reference to “Ransom” is most likely Luther N. Ransom and the reference to “Jewett” was probably Benjamin F. Jewett. A review of the records of the Sangamon County Recorder of Deeds records reveals that on March 3, 1838, Benjamin F. Jewett purchased property at the northwest corner of First and Washington streets, just three blocks northwest from the Globe Tavern. Would that be “just above the Globe”? Was this Ransom’s boarding house referred to in the 1841 handbill for the runaway slaves? In August 1844 Luther’s wife, Zerviah, died, and Luther and his two sons moved to Utopia, Ohio, on the Ohio River. There he joined a group of 250 Frenchmen who were members of a communal society known as the Fourierite Association. He married there and he and his new wife had one child, Albert. In December 1847 the Ohio River flooded and a very large brick building, owned and occupied by the Fourierites, was flooded and collapsed killing one hundred persons, including Luther’s wife and two eldest children. Albert survived. In 1848 Ransom and his baby son left the Fourierites and joined the Shakers at Lebanon, Ohio. He remained with the Shakers until August 1859, when he and his son moved west to Lawrence, Kansas, where Luther lived until his death in July 1872.

The Underground Railroad, Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois, 1901.