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Discover Ohio's Black History by Traveling the Underground Railroad

The year is 1831. Escaped slave Tice Davids plunges into the mighty Ohio River and swims north to freedom. A boat carrying his master is in pursuit. As he reaches the Ohio bank near Ripley, Davids hides in a thicket. Seeing a lantern in the window of a stately home, he knows there is help to be found there. His former master loses sight of him; throwing up his hands, he says, "It's as if he's gone off on an underground railroad."

COLUMBUS, Ohio (Feb. 3, 2009) – Black History Month presents the perfect opportunity for travelers to follow in the footsteps and experience the struggles and triumphs the slaves faced when crossing into the State of Ohio and taking the Underground Railroad to freedom. Through the dark days of slavery and the contentious fight against it to the civil rights movement and into the modern era, Ohio has been a beacon for justice. The African-American experience has left an indelible footprint on this state for you to discover. Plan to feel inspired, challenged and moved when you stop to visit the stations along this railroad to freedom. Here are some highlights along the way:

Southern Ohio

The Rankin House - Ripley

The Rankin House was a first stop along the Underground Railroad for many slaves seeking to escape the South. The owner of the home, John Rankin, was a Presbyterian minister and educator who was devoted to the antislavery movement. In 1826, he published an antislavery book and in 1834, he founded the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society in Zanesville. He and his wife Jean worked together with many of their neighbors and friends in Brown County to provide a safe haven to more than 2,000 slaves over the course of a 40-year period beginning in 1825. The Rankin Home is now a National Historic Landmark and part of the National Underground Railroad to Freedom Network. Outside, visitors can view a reconstruction of the stairway used by slaves to climb out of the Ohio River and into the Rankin House. Ripley also offers travelers several other exciting attractions to visit including the John P. Parker House and the Ripley Museum. For more information about the Rankin House, please visit: www.ohiohistory.org

The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center – Cincinnati

The National Underground Railroad Freedom Center opened in August 2004, just steps away from the banks of the Ohio River. Its mission is to tell the dramatic story of the enslaved who crossed that river on their journey to freedom and the men and women of all backgrounds who hated slavery and created a secret network of escape routes that came to be called the Underground Railroad. In the spirit of the 19th Century abolitionists, the Freedom Center is also dedicated to inspiring the current generation to take action on injustices in the world today, such as human trafficking; and to pursue freedom and justice for all. www.freedomcenter.org

The Putnam Underground Railroad Education (PURE) Center – Zanesville

Located in the Putnam Historic District, the Putnam Underground Railroad Education Center preserves local and national history. Features of the center include a 500-volume library collection about the Underground Railroad and abolitionist movement, and a museum with artifacts from Africa and the Civil War. The center is located in the midst of sites important to the anti-slavery efforts, including the George Guthrie House, a documented stop on the Underground Railroad; and the Putnam Presbyterian Church where Reverend William Beecher (brother of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” author Harriet Beecher Stowe) preached anti-slavery sermons. For more information on the PURE center, please visit: www.purecenter.org

Central Ohio

The Kelton House – Columbus

The Kelton House was owned by Fernando and Sophia Kelton, who believed that slavery was wrong and did all they could to help slaves who were trying to escape. This was against the law, and anyone caught hiding slaves,

giving them food or clothing, or helping them flee north, risked jail time and a \$1,000 fine, a hefty sum at that time. The Keltons were passionate and served as a station master/conductor on the road to freedom for many years. The Kelton House has been authenticated as a stop on the Underground Railroad through the oral history of the Kelton and Lawrence families. Although no written records exist of where the slaves hid during an impending raid by slavecatchers, the servants' quarters or the 300 gallon cistern in the Keltons' yard, when empty, would have made good hiding places. The Keltons also gave a home to a slave named Martha, who was too ill to make the trip to Canada for 10 years, until she married. They then employed her husband, a free African-American carpenter for more than 37 years. The two families have been connected since. www.keltonhouse.com

Northeast Ohio

First Church – Oberlin

Built in 1842, this church hosted the Oberlin Anti-Slavery Society. It also sheltered escaping slaves fleeing toward freedom. First Church was the site of several funerals associated with resistance to slavery. Here, two men of John Brown's army, Shields Green and John Copeland, were memorialized after they were hung for treason in the 1859 raid on the federal arsenal in Harpers Ferry. The funeral for 4-year-old Lee Howard Dobbins, who died of tuberculosis in Oberlin on his way to freedom, was also held here. A stone in Westwood Cemetery marks his resting place. After you visit the First Church in Oberlin, take a walking tour and visit the Wilson Bruce Evans House, a stop on the Underground Railroad, The Harper's Ferry Memorial, The Oberlin-Wellington Rescue Monument and many other historical sites. To learn more about the walking tour and the rich history of the area, visit: <http://www2.oberlin.edu/external/EOG/CivilWarTour/CivilWarTour.html>.

Other Sites Along the Underground Railroad

Travelers can discover more of Ohio's many Underground Railroad stations by visiting <http://www.passagetofreedomohio.org/>. To learn more about Black History in Ohio, visit www.discoverohio.com or call 1-800-BUCKEYE. Free Discover Ohio Travel Planners and Ohio Calendars of Events can be ordered anytime night or day. Travel counselors are available at 1-800-BUCKEYE to assist callers weekdays from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. and weekends 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

About the Ohio Tourism Division

The Ohio Tourism Division is the premier source of information for travelers and media about Ohio's vibrant tourism experiences, attractions, and economy. Division marketing programs contributed to an estimated \$38 billion in visitor sales in 2007 and 454,000 jobs sustained by visitors to the state. A part of the Ohio Department of Development, the Division's mission is to promote and celebrate Ohio's unique travel opportunities and market the state's outstanding quality of life.

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