

Driving Tour of Underground Railroad Homes in Delaware County

Prepared by the Delaware County Historical Society



Please note, that except for the Meeker Homestead on Stratford Road, the rest of these locations are private homes. This driving tour is just for an outside look at the homes along the routes of the UGRR in Delaware County.



1. The Meeker Family

Address: 2690 Stratford Rd., Delaware, OH

We are here to begin our tour of Underground Railroad sites of Delaware County. Our journey begins here at the Meeker Homestead. The places we will be showing you have stories which tell us that fugitive slaves were hidden at these locations. Much of this is oral history, and due to the

necessary secrecy of the Underground Railroad, the facts were not written down. Let's begin our journey and go first to what is now the corner of Jewett Road and St. Rt. 315.

This marker is located on E. William Street near St. Mary's Church. The UGRR activity including the story of Ostrander's William Cratty can be found on this marker.



2. House of the Seven Oaks

Address: 324 East William Street, Delaware

The House at Oak Grove, later called the House of the Seven Oaks, is located on US RT 36 which is called East William St. in the city of Delaware. It is just east of Conger School. It is the only home in the city of Delaware which has traditionally been known as a stop on the Underground Railroad. At the time this home was built, there were very few houses in the area. This view of the house shows it facing west toward the Olentangy River which is perhaps a mile away. At that time, there was no home between the house and the river. Today, this house faces the back yards of several homes.





This is now a private home, and this is the only view the public has as you drive down William Street. Look to the south to see this side of the home. Unlike some stops on the UGRR that we have shown you, this home had no hiding place in evidence. The story of the 7 Oaks home includes the intrigue of the room itself where the fugitive slaves were hidden. Fugitive slaves came to this home by 2 different means of travel. It is believed that some of the fugitive slaves were making their way north following the Olentangy River.

Across from Ohio Wesleyan's football stadium on the east bank of the Olentangy River, is an area which was known as the Coppers. At that time, it was a low swampy area infested with copperhead rattlesnakes. Fugitive slaves would make their way through the Coppers and up the embankment to the 7 Oaks in the distance. By the 1850's a second means of travel was available. It was the railroad which passes through the city close to this home. Fugitive slaves hidden in boxcars were told that when they approached this home the engineer would sound the whistle in such a way that they would know they should jump off the train. The train would also slow down for them allowing them to safely do this. As to where do they enter the home, we look at this porch on the southeast side of the house. The porch does not seem to be anything unusual...



Before the house was changed, this room had no entryway to the rest of the house. Fugitive slaves entered through the hidden basement steps into the basement and then went up another set of hidden stairs into this attic room. This is where the fugitive slaves were hidden.



3.The Sharp Family.

Address: 8025 Africa Rd., Westerville, OH

The Sharpe family lived at the very southern edge of Delaware County close to Westerville. Westerville was very active on the Underground Railroad. As fugitive slaves were moved north from Westerville to Delaware County, they followed the route of the Alum Creek. The first known stop north of Westerville was at the Sharpe Homestead

On entering the house, fugitive slaves were lead to the basement where they were hidden in case of danger. The location where they were hidden was unique. At the east end of the basement was a fireplace made of stone and brick. The stones were removed at the back of the fireplace and the fugitive slaves could crawl through into a dug out earthen area. The stones would be replaced and there was no evidence as to where they were hidden from nosy slave catchers.

In the late 1800s, an addition was made to the back of the house. The dug out earthen area was removed. Today you can walk all the way around that fireplace and see it from behind. This photo shows that fireplace from behind. Notice how irregular the stones and bricks are in the lower portion of the fireplace. That is how the fugitive slaves were brought into this area.



4. The Patterson House. Address: 6525 Africa Rd., Galena, OH Orange Township

This is the Patterson home. The Patterson home is located along the Alum Creek 2 or 3 miles north of the Sharpe home. It is just to the south of the crossroads called Africa in Delaware County. This area was very active on the Underground Railroad being a direct route from Westerville to points north with the destination of the Benedict home and the Quaker community just to the north of Delaware County. Fugitive slaves, which were hidden on the Patterson property, were probably hidden in the barn in the area behind the house. The barn is no longer there.



Patterson House

5. Africa Community Historical Marker

Address: Alum Creek State Park, Entrance at Africa Road



“In 1859 slaves from a North Carolina plantation owned by the Alston family were sent north. The plantation’s mistress had disapproved of slavery and made arrangement for the slaves to travel to Ohio and freedom. These slaves moved to the community of Africa, lived in log homes, were employed by the anti-slavery farmers, and joined the Wesleyan Methodist Church. After the Civil War the freed slaves left Africa and settled in the communities of Delaware and Westerville, and Van Wert and Paulding Counties.”

6. The Fleming Family. ADDRESS: 4176 N. Old State Rd., Kilbourne, OH

We are looking for historical information about this home and area. If you can contribute any information, please contact the Historical Society.

- 7. The Benedict Homes, Reuben and Aaron Benedict**
ADDRESS: 1463 Co. Rd. 24, Marengo, OH Peru Township
and 1131 Co. Rd. #24, Peru Township (Delaware Co. Rd. #10).
The Alum Creek Friends Church is also along this route on
State Route 229 where the historical marker is located.
Originally in Delaware County, these homes are now in Morrow Co.



These homes were the most important stops just across the Delaware County line in Morrow County along Alum Creek. William Cratty, the Sharps and the Pattersons all sent runaways to the Benedicts who were along the Alum Creek. Other people also sent runaways here. The Benedicts were a part of the Quaker



community and the Alum Creek Friends Church. When slave hunters were in the are and wanted to search their home, Mrs. Benedict would use her noisy spinning wheel to hide possible sounds that runaways might make as they hid under the floorboards.

- 8. The Crawford Family.**
ADDRESS: 3722 Marysville Rd. (U.S. Route 36), Delaware, OH



The story of this farm dates to the 1820s when the Crawford family moved to this location from the state of Virginia. The Crawfords and the McClures, who were related, were all involved with this property. When the Crawfords came from Virginia, they brought with them their slaves. Of course, the people were freed upon coming into Ohio, but they continued to live and work for the Crawfords as paid tenant farmers. The Crawfords became involved in the Underground Railroad. The fugitive slaves who were escaping were coming to this location from the west.

As you notice, this property is not located on a stream. Where they hid the fugitive slaves on this property is unknown. One half mile to the east was the Bevan property. Some of the former slaves who were freed were hired to work as tenant farmers for the Bevans.

Legend has it that on at least one occasion slave hunters and law enforcement people came in search of fugitive slaves and questioned whether these black tenant farmers were runaways. The Crawfords and Bevans, along with the tenant farmers brandishing weapons, met with those slave hunters and officials ordering them to leave because these were freed people not fugitive slaves.



9. The Bartholomew Family.

ADDRESS: Corner of Jewett Rd. (Powell) and St. Route 315 (Powell)

This is the home that belonged to the Bartholomew family. It is located on the west side of the Olentangy River and along the Bartholomew Run.



In the previous picture, we were looking at the home looking west. This side of the home is a view looking south, and in front of it are the sides of the Bartholomew Run. The run flows to the east which is to the left of the picture. In a very short distance, it opens into the Olentangy River.

The story is that the fugitive slaves would be coming north along the Olentangy River and would turn into this creek to the Bartholomew home. Although we call it the Underground Railroad, most of the time it was not underground. Normally, there were no tunnels leading to homes. This is one of the exceptions. Notice that the creek is quite close to the house. The sides were steep and a tunnel was indeed dug from the creek to the basement of the home. The fugitive slaves would enter the house through an opening in the wall. If slave catchers were coming to search the home, a large cupboard was placed in front of the secret entry way and the fugitive slaves could be hidden in the tunnel while the search was taking place.

10. The Van Deman Home. ADDRESS: 6 Darlington Rd., Delaware, OH



Van Deman House



This home at 6 Darlington Rd. was owned by Reverend Henry Van Deman who moved to Delaware in 1824. This home is believed to be the second oldest home in the city of Delaware still standing on its original foundation. Reverend Van Deman was a pastor of the Delaware Presbyterian Church. The Van Demans were known to be against slavery, and it is thought that they were also conductors on the Underground Railroad.



11. The Lucy Depp Family. Now Lucy Depp Park

ADDRESS: 6381 Harriott Rd., Powell, OH

Concord Township, North of Shawnee Hills, Delaware County



This is where Abraham Depp's house stood. The only portion of Abraham's original home that is still in existence is the basement where the fugitive slaves were hidden. After Abraham's death, his daughter Lucy inherited the home. She later gave it to her nephew, Robert Goode.

There is a cistern underneath the chimney. The Depps used to hide fugitive slaves inside the cistern. Former owners of

this house had the cistern filled in. The bell you see is the bell the Depps used to ring to signal fugitive slaves that it was safe to come to the house. Until they heard the bell, fugitive slaves would hide in a cave by the Scioto River. The cave has been under water since the O'Shaughnessy Reservoir was created.



You can imagine the fugitive slaves coming down these stairs... and entering this room in the basement. I bet their hearts were racing and they were terrified of being caught, and yet, for the moment, they were in a safe haven.

This map shows the locations of known homes that were safe houses on the Underground Railroad. People would never have created a map like this, because if the wrong person got ahold of it, the secret houses would be known and the lives of the fugitive slaves would be in danger, and the conductors living in these homes would be arrested.

Since secrecy was so important in keeping fugitive slaves safe, they had to hide while they were traveling and when they got to the safe houses. They hid in homes, barns, and in outside. Look at the pictures that are hung around the room and imagine that you were a fugitive slave.

Delaware County Stations On The Underground Railroad

- Meeker Homestead
- Patterson House
- Ashley House
- House of Seven Oaks
- Bartholomew House
- Hodges House
- McClure Tavern and Barn
- Depp Settlement
- Van Daman House
- Sharpe House

