

# THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD UNION COUNTY, OHIO

## A BARREL OF FLOUR

Sometimes a barrel of flour was the only thing separating a runaway slave from capture. Marysville had at least sixteen operators, and one of the most involved was Deacon Cherry (see map #3.)

Cherry and his wife lodged fugitives in a room on the ground floor of their home. If pursuit was close, the wayfarers were moved into a closet at the back of the hall then down through a trap-door into a dark cellar room. A flour barrel was then set back on the trap-door.

## SMALL GROUPS

The largest group harbored by the Cherrys numbered eleven runaways, in the fall of 1852. The next night they were hauled to another station by Edward Powers.

## SHAKING THE TAIL

Because bloodhounds could not track scent though water, runaways would often use the many creeks and streams of this area to their advantage.

## LOCAL CODE WORDS

Conductors and Station Masters often talked in code, and according to a Marysville Journal Tribune interview with Mr. Mayo in 1881, the code adopted locally referred to runaways as livestock. Pass code: "I have two brown cows ready for you; when will you come get them?"

## COMMUNITY

In 1842 an antislavery convention was held in Marysville with 40-50 attendees from Union, Champaign, Delaware and Logan Counties. From 1830-1865 Marysville is said to have had at least 16 stations for runaways to hide and rest for the next leg or their journey. Those stations were cover for more than 250 Freedom Seekers.



## ROLES

### CONDUCTOR

"Conductors" on the railroad guided or transported slaves from station to station.

Mr. Joe Mayo was the primary Conductor for Marysville, and he once turned down a \$200 bribe (worth more than \$6,000 in 2017) from bounty hunters.

Quakers also frequently carried runaways in their wagons from depot to depot.

### STATION MASTER

Resting spots along the way were called "stations" or "depots," and those in charge were called "Station Masters."

Deacon Cherry was the most well-known Station Master, and fugitives always knew before reaching Marysville that if they could find Deacon Cherry, he would care for them (Marysville Journal Tribune, 1893.)



EDWARD LEWIS.

**\$100 REWARD.**—Run away from the subscriber, on the 7th of November, negro slave, EDGAR. He is 36 years old, 6 feet high, of dark brown complexion, very high forehead, is a little bald, and is inclined to stoop in the shoulders. Edgar says he was raised in Norfolk county, has worked about Norfolk several years. I bought him at the Auction house of Messrs. Pulliam & Davis, the 20th of July, 1856. The bill of sale was signed by W. Y. Milner for Jas. A. Bilisly, administrator of G. W. Chambers, dec'd. He told one of my negroes he was going to Norfolk to sell some plunder he had there, then go to Richmond, steal his wife, get on board a boat about Norfolk, and go to a free State. He can read and write well, and I have no doubt he has provided himself with papers of some kind. He may have purchased the papers of some free negro. I will give the above reward of One Hundred Dollars to any person who will arrest and confine him, so I can get him.

My Post office is Laurel, N. C.

C. H. GAY.  
no. 21.



## AN INCREDIBLE STORY

The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 meant that escaped slaves could be captured in Free States and returned to their owner. In Marysville, there are several accounts of capture.

Once a man, his wife and child were "under grounded" to Cherry from North Lewisburg. When Cherry thought that all was safe, he led them to the next station, "Brother Cratty's" in Delaware County." This happened to be, one of the few instances when Cherry reasoned incorrectly. They were apprehended at the Scioto River and returned to Marysville. Cherry secured a writ of habeas corpus and had it regularly served upon the party to make them show why the fugitives were being held. One, P.E. Cole was employed as his counsel and received a fee of five dollars. This caused a delay for quite a while. The fugitives were thrust in the old filthy log prison for safe keeping. The trial had to come off before a justice of peace at Milford Center (Union County's first county seat). In the interim, pending the trial, the child of the fugitives, about a year old, was abducted. It had been slipped to a group of Quakers, and when the trial came off nobody, including its parents, knew where the child was. The child was sent to Berlin where it was properly cared for and educated. In the meantime, the trial ended in no good for the fugitives, they were forced to return to bondage. When the master, elated over the court's decision, came to recover his stolen stock, he found that the child was missing. The infuriated master was by no means hesitant in heaping curses of vengeance on the heads of the displeased abolitionists of Marysville, invoking the maledictions of the Satanic powers upon them forever. He was especially charitable in this respect to Cherry, whom he charged with being the cause of all his delays, losses, and troubles. Though he searched diligently for the child and offered a tempting reward for it, the child was not found and he was compelled to return home without it. The slaves were taken back to their old home in Kentucky, where not long after the wife was "sold South", the husband being retained by the master. Soon after the husband escaped again and unexpectedly turned up in Marysville a second time where he was met with the same kind treatment he had received before. This time he escaped and reached Canada. While at Marysville, the second time, Mr. Cherry "gave him further points regarding his child which he doubtless afterwards found."

## THE RIVER JORDAN

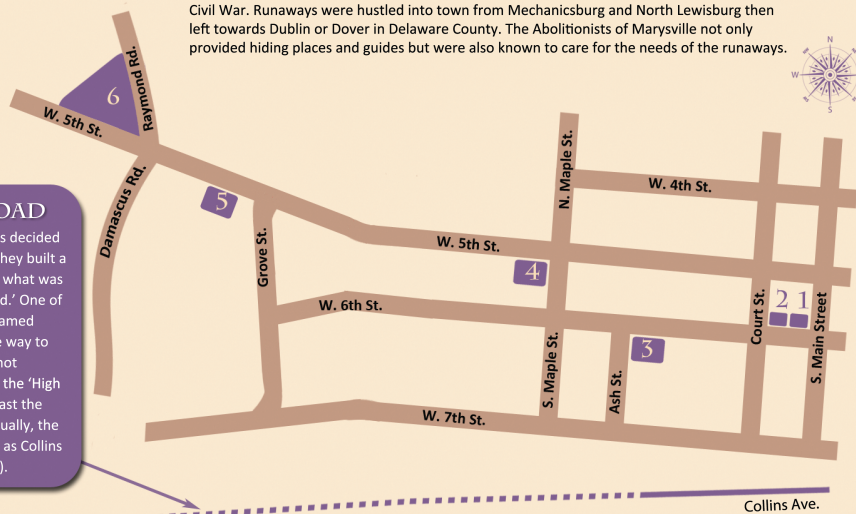
Using biblical references, escaping slaves referred to the Ohio River as the "River Jordan", and Canada was referred to as the "Promised Land". Ohio had the most active system in the country, given its close proximity to slave states and Canada. The main entry point to Ohio was along the Ohio River, and winter was the most active time, since fugitives could cross on foot over the dangerous ice. They would then take one of the many routes through Ohio to reach an exit port to cross Lake Erie into Canada.



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## MARYSVILLE: WHERE ROUTES MERGED

Marysville was an underground railroad center from about 1830 until the beginning of the Civil War. Runaways were hustled into town from Mechanicsburg and North Lewisburg then left towards Dublin or Dover in Delaware County. The Abolitionists of Marysville not only provided hiding places and guides but were also known to care for the needs of the runaways.



### COLLINS ROAD

Some runaway slaves decided to stay in the area. They built a small community on what was called the "High Road." One of these families was named Collins, and soon the way to Milford Center was not referred to as taking the "High Road" but as going past the Collins' cabin. Eventually, the road became known as Collins (now Collins Avenue).



Oakdale Cemetery  
1290 W. 5th St.  
Many known operators are buried here, including Asa Cary, Cyrtan Lee, George Cherry, Edward Powers and William Lee.



Mayo Cabin Site  
1105 W. 5th St.  
Uncle Joe Mayo moved to Marysville as a free person of color in 1848. Mayo served as a "conductor" on the railroad; he fed and transported an estimated 250 runaway slaves.



Kinney Barn Site  
423 W. 5th St.  
Dr. Stephen F. Kinney's barn, built in 1845, was used as a hiding place for travelers on the Underground Railroad.



Deacon Samuel A. Cherry and his wife built their small brick house on W. Fifth Street in 1843 and lodged fugitives on the underground railroad.



New School Presbyterian Church  
124 W. 6th St.  
Many operators belonged to this church, later called the Congregational Church. Samuel A. Cherry was a deacon here.



The Cyrtan Lee home, 118 West 6th St., is the oldest brick house in Marysville, and it is the only surviving original Railroad structure in the city.

1830  
Marysville became active

1840  
Cherry became active

1842  
Anti-slavery convention held in Marysville

1848  
Mayo moved to Marysville

1850  
Fugitive Slave Act

1855  
First Covered Bridge in Union County

1863  
Emancipation Proclamation

1865  
Civil War Ended

Jackson 1829- 1837

Van Buren 1837- 1841

Harrison 1841

Tyler 1841-1845

Polk 1845 - 1849

Taylor 1849 - 1850

Fillmore 1850 - 1853

Pierce 1853 - 1857

Buchanan 1857 - 1861

Lincoln 1861 - 1865

UNITED STATES PRESIDENTS