

## THE STORY OF THE LYMAN HOYT HOUSE

### SUMMARY

The Lyman Hoyt House, located in the village of Lancaster, Jefferson County Indiana is just 10 miles from the Ohio River. It is a site that offers a rich first-hand account on how a woodworking factory owner became an abolitionist and conductor within the borders of the Underground Railroad. Hoyt's devotion to his work and to the commitment to the plight of the fugitive slave later became known through the writings of his children and wife. His home is very modest and is restrained of any ornamentation. Devoted to his family, his work, the Underground Railroad, and the Neil's Creek Anti- Slavery Society, he was very instrumental in guiding the fugitive slave to the next stop north. His children were influenced by his actions, several went on to be involved with social needs in their lives such as Women Suffrage Movement and Native American issues in the West.

Hoyt's home presents an excellent opportunity to illustrate how a family was devoted to such an important cause. Levi Coffin, President of the Underground Railroad refers to the village of Lancaster as the "New England Settlement" when referencing deliveries of fugitive slaves from Jefferson County as many of the abolitionists were from Maine and Vermont.

### THE STORY

"Father was a member of the aforesaid secret anti-slavery society and was a conductor on the Underground Railroad transferring slaves from one station to another-always under the cover of darkness and although he was suspected he was never caught". This passage, written in 1930, by Lyman Hoyt's daughter Lois B. Hoyt. It is through these first hand accounts of Lyman's daughter that we are able to reconstruct his responsibilities as a Conductor on the Underground Railroad.

Lyman and his wife Aseneth Whipple Hoyt (Niece of William Whipple signer of the Declaration of Independence) moved to Lancaster under the suggestion of Aseneth's sister. Lyman and Aseneth Hoyt moved from the state of Vermont to Lancaster. Lancaster had developed into an abolitionist stronghold and its residents were strongly opposed to slavery.

In 1819, abolitionist families such as the Hoyts, Tibbetts, and Nelsons, founded the Neil's Creek Anti-Slavery Society. Lancaster then began to be known as an abolitionist stronghold and served as the second or third stop on the Underground Railroad in Jefferson County, Indiana. Lyman Hoyt served as one of the founding officers of the Neil's Creek Anti-Slavery Society and in January 1839 helped draft a series of resolutions for the organization. Hoyt, as an active abolitionist, submitted information and articles to *The Philanthropist*--an abolitionist newspaper printed in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Hoyt and six other delegates later represented the organization by attending at the state wide Anti-Slavery Convention held in Greensburg, Indiana on June 5, 1839. In 1845, members of the Neil' s Creek Anti-Slavery Society affiliated themselves with the National Liberty Party, thus moving the slavery debate into their political arena.

Other first hand accounts from Mrs. Lucy Anne Hoyt Thompson (Hoyt's Daughter) "I distinctly remember that we almost wished they (Lyman & Aseneth Hoyt) would be less conscientious.... he would not use New Orleans sugar or molasses and he wore only home spun clothes, woolen in winter and linen in summer."

Lyman's daughter, Lois Hoyt witnessed the actions of the Underground Railroad first hand and writes, "He was one of the most noted of the Underground Railroad Conductors", "I slept on a trundle bed in my parent's room and was frequently wakened by my mother sobbing and my father stealthy leaving or entering the room in the dark. One morning I overheard part of a -whispered conversation between my parents. Father said, Well, I have got the Negroes, five of them, three men, a women and a baby, and I don't know what on earth to do with the women and baby--for the child cries all the time, it is Sunday, some one will be here soon and sure and hear it." Lyman proceeded to take the fugitive slaves to the next stop for safety.

Through the years until Lyman-'s death in 1857, he helped countless fugitive slaves as a conductor. Lyman's reputation evidently was known by the Jefferson County's slave catcher Right Rea often visited the Hoyt Home but never caught Lyman in his "work".

In 1849, Lyman and other Anti-Slavery Society members helped Thomas Craven to establish Eleutherian College (also owned by Historic Eleutherian College, Inc). The Eleutherian College, now a designated National Historic Landmark, was established to educate everyone regardless of color of skin or sex. Lyman's experience in woodworking and building aided in the construction of the Eleutherian College.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Anti-Slavery Men." *Madison Courier*. June 15, 1874

Baker, Frank. "Anti-Slavery Society Formed." *Madison Courier*. August 27, 1982

Crenshaw, Gwendolyn. "*Bury me in a Free Land*". *The Abolitionist Movement in Indiana, 1816-1865*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1993

"Gives Lancaster History." *Madison Courier*. November 23, 193 8

Hoyt Lois L. Letter to unknown correspondent, 1930, Jefferson County Public Library. Photocopied typescript

\_\_\_\_\_. From a collection of letters written in the 1930's, Jefferson Public Library. Photocopied typescript

Hoyt, Auretta. "Reminiscences of the old slavery days and the deeds of the early abolitionist in Jefferson County." *Indianapolis Journal*, January 31, 1880

"Minute Book of Neil's Creek Anti-Slavery Society, 1839-1845, Jefferson County, Indiana." Indiana Division, Indiana State Library. Photocopied Manuscript

Seibert, William. *The Underground Railroad--From Slavery to Freedom*, New York: Macmillian Co., 1898

Tibbetts Mrs, *Underground Railroad* September 11, 1880. *Indianapolis Journal*