

Milton House

Missouri. This statement follows an understanding that there are several Underground Railroad locations at or near the Rock River through western Illinois, including Galesburg at Knox College, Prophetstown, Dixon and the Lucius Read home in Byron. Pardon Kimball constructed the Read home and his daughter, Ida Kimball Davis, married Jeremiah Milton Davis, grandson of Joseph Goodrich through his daughter Jane.

The Milton House could have played a key role in the movement of fugitive slaves coming out of Missouri or Arkansas and north through Illinois, into Wisconsin. Fugitives from Missouri could make their way up the Rock River from location to location as far north as what is today known as Newville, located at the southern mouth of Lake Koshkonong, a wide portion of the Rock River.

In the late 1840s and 1850s the area that is Newville, located about six miles west of the Milton House, was known as Goodrich Crossing. William Anson Goodrich, younger brother of Joseph by thirteen years, operated a ferry boat on the Rock River, ferrying people across the river at the mouth of Koshkonong. A small cemetery on a hill overlooking the river on property now known as Leisure Estates Campground holds the circa 1840s graves of several William Anson Goodrich family members, including that of his only son.

The Sabbath Recorder, the newspaper of the Seventh Day Baptist denomination, noted that William Anson Goodrich "was credited with conducting runaways along the Underground Railroad thru part of Illinois to his brother Joseph's home in

Milton, Wisconsin."

It can be surmised that with William Anson Goodrich traveling up and down the river on his boat, it's likely he was a key player in getting fugitives off the river and either first to the nearby Seventh Day Baptist settlement of Albion or directly to the Milton House. From the Milton House fugitives could continue an eastward journey toward Lake Michigan, either to the Racine Harbor or other points of departure along the lake's shore.

Several stories and pieces of evidence suggest the Milton House played a role in the eastward movement of fugitive slaves through southern Wisconsin. Local tales and rumors of the Goodrich family's efforts to hide and scurry fugitive slaves prior to the Civil War permeated the village well into the early 1900s. It was common knowledge to many locals that the Milton House "was a safe refuge for the fugitive slave," as stated in the biography of Joseph Goodrich printed in the 1877 United States Biographical Dictionary, Wisconsin Volume.

Many sites in Wisconsin which are rumored to have had Underground Railroad activity also have local stories and legends about the hiding and assisting of fugitive slaves. The Milton House remains as the only site in Wisconsin authenticated by the National Network to Freedom as having Underground Railroad activity that can still be toured. It is the evidence and stories of William Coon Davis, Varnum Hull and Andrew Pratt that ratify that designation.

William Coon Davis

The story offered by Mabel Van de Mark of her uncle William Coon Davis was included in the Land-

mark Papers, the document written by National Historic Landmark researchers and presented at the time the Milton House was cited as Wisconsin's thirty-first National Historic Landmark in 1998.

Van de Mark was the granddaughter of Joseph Goodrich, born in Davis Junction, Ill. in 1874 to Jeremiah and Jane Goodrich Davis. Van de Mark passed away in 1973 at age 99 and was the longest-surviving grandchild of Joseph and Nancy Goodrich. She often told the story of how her uncle Ezra Goodrich made a point to show his nieces the tunnel connecting the basement of the Milton House with the cabin located behind the hotel. During the 1890s Ezra took Van de Mark to the tunnel and told her his family used the basement and tunnel to hide fugitive slaves prior to the Civil War.

Van de Mark had another story about the Underground Railroad. In a volume of the Goodrich-Davis Family History, a copy of which is located in the Milton Historical Society archives, she repeats a story passed through her family's generations. The story was handed down by an uncle of Van de Mark's, William Coon Davis. Will Davis was born in 1843 in Milton, the son of Jeremiah R. and Mercy Davis. His brother was the younger Jeremiah Davis who married Jane Goodrich. Will Davis was a young man in the late 1850s when he was asked by Joseph Goodrich to drive a wagon filled with hay from the Milton House east toward Elkhorn and to stop at a certain inn. The approximate twenty-mile trip began after dusk and the only instruction given to Will Davis was to go into the inn, have a meal and return the

wagon to the Milton House. He was given no instructions to unload anything from the wagon or to load other materials for the return trip.

Will Davis relates that while he was driving the wagon east on Territorial Road, he could hear rustling in the back of the wagon - whispers and movement. He knew there were people under the hay. Davis said he did as instructed without investigating the contents of the wagon. Davis said that on the way home, returning to the Milton House around dawn, he knew the wagon was empty, save for the hay.

Just a few years later in 1861, Davis enlisted in the Union Army and fought in the Civil War. He was discharged in Nashville in 1865. Davis removed to El Monte, Calif., in 1894 and engaged in Walnut farming. It was in El Monte where he passed in 1931 at age 87.

Varnum Hull

Varnum Hull was among the New York Seventh Day Baptists who followed Joseph Goodrich to Wisconsin. Born in Alfred, N.Y. in 1811, Hull was from a family of five siblings, four of whom became Seventh Day Baptist pastors. Hull was the pastor of Milton's Seventh Day Baptist Church from 1850 to 1856 and then the Rock River Seventh Day Baptist Church located between Milton and the Rock River.

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In 2016, Hull's great-great-granddaughter, Edna Dearborn, told the Milton Historical Society a story that has passed through her family's generations. Dearborn was 89 years old and living in the Racine when she shared a story told to her by her great-grandmother, Jeanie Hull Mudge. Mudge was in her 90s and Dearborn a young girl in the 1930s when Mudge talked about the times she rode on wagons driven by her father, Varnum Hull, between Albion and the Milton House. Each time they made that trip, Mudge told Dearborn, the wagon carried sacks of potatoes. Under the potato sacks were fugitive slaves being taken to the Milton House.

Albion is located about nine miles northwest of Milton and just a few miles north of the Rock River and Goodrich Crossing. Albion was a Seventh Day Baptist settlement founded a few years after Joseph Goodrich began platting Milton. Albion's Seventh Day Baptist Academy was founded a few years after Goodrich founded Milton Academy. Albion's Seventh Day Baptist Church was formed in 1843 by Oliver Perry Hull, younger

brother of Varnum. The church still stands, its architecture bearing a striking resemblance to Milton's original Seventh Day Baptist Church.

Although not documented by the National Network to Freedom, the original Albion church building is locally rumored to have been a safe haven for fugitive slaves. According to a story relayed in 1950 to the Madison Capital Times newspaper, local historian Claude Stout claimed that in the 1850s, radical abolitionist students at Albion Academy dug a subterranean chamber under the Albion church for the specific purpose of hiding fugitive slaves.

Albion is located less than three miles north of Goodrich Crossing. It is possible fugitives were getting to Albion, via William Anson Goodrich. From Albion, Joseph Goodrich collaborators such as Varnum Hull and Will Davis could facilitate the eastward movement of fugitives through southern Wisconsin.

Andrew Pratt

The story of Andrew Pratt's arrival in Milton in 1861 offers written documentation of a fugitive

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