

THE UNDERGROUND RAILWAY::: & AUNT BETSY.

AUNT BETSY a grand old coloured lady living in Fort Erie on Lavinia St. in a section of the town that at the time was known as "Nigger Hill". She came to this area, a refugee of slavery, sometime prior to 1837, as she herself says "a good time before the Canadian Rebellion". This interesting woman was Mrs. Betsy Robinson, known throughout the area as Aunt Betsy. Her mother and father and their seven children were all slaves on a plantation in Virginia. Betsy says "I've seen them slaves in gangs being sent to New Orleans singing, and playing on jewsharps, letting on be all that careless and Happy. "But not so for her father Baker. He made ready to escape. For a week before hand his wife hid food in the woods. On a dark night the whole family stole away from the plantation, crossed the river, probably the north fork of the Shenandoah, and pushed north.

According to Aunt Betsy there were a good many white people in the south those days that helped the runaways.. She was a little girl then, and she could recall the child's vivid impressions of the weeks they spent travelling and hiding in the mountains, which she says were full of rattlesnakes, wolves and deer. It was a wild country that they crossed for they came out at Washington P.A. here the Quakers helped them, and her father and brothers worked in the coal mines for a time. Then they came on to Pittsburg. From that city north there was no lack of help. "We walked all the way," she said. "There were no railroads in those days and I don't remember we got any wagon rides". You see we were so many, nine in all". I remember we went to Erie and came through Fredonia. We walked through Buffalo, remember it was little then- and down the river road. My father missed the Black Rock Ferry, and we went down to where the bridge is now. I remember we had to walk back up the river, and then we got brought over to Fort Erie. That was a good while before the Canadian Rebellion".

Speaking of former slaves, Aunt Betsy says "the old heads bout all gone now". Between Fort Erie and Ridgeway lived Daniel Woods, a former slave

who came through the under-ground. Harriet Black a sister-in-law of aunt Betsy lived near Ridgeway, and was also a "passenger". There are many survivors on the Canadian side of the Niagara, that were "freed by the Bayonet", and came North with no fear of slave catchers.

Of this class at Fort Erie are, Melford Harris and Thomas Banks. Mr. Banks was sold from Virginia to go down the river, got his freedom at Natchez, joined the 102nd Michigan infantry, and fought for the Union, until the end of the war...

These accounts taken from an interview given to Miss Mildred C. Green of the Courier Express, by Aunt Betsy.



ABODE OF "AUNT BETSY" ROBINSON, FORT ERIE.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILWAY, and Aunt Betsy::

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