The River-to-Lake Freedom Trail

The Underground Railroad was neither underground, nor a railroad, but a loose network of trails used by anti-slavery activists, free Blacks and churches to help fugitive slaves flee from the South to Canada. Ohio had one of the most active Underground Railroad networks in the nation, with 40,000 slaves escaping to freedom through Ohio in the years before the Civil War.

Friends of Freedom Society, Inc.
Ohio Underground Railroad Association

The Friends of Freedom Society Inc. (FOFS) and the Ohio Underground Railroad Association (the research arm of FOFS) are grassroots, all volunteer organizations dedicated to the research, identification, documentation, and preservation of Underground Railroad sites in Ohio. The Friends of Freedom Society and the State of Ohio Historic Preservation Office collaborated in the research, writing and authentication of the historic texts. Preservation Office collaborated in the research, writing and authentication of the historic texts. FOFS has distributed red marker flags with its logo to documented Underground Railroad sites in communities around Ohio.

The Ohio Underground Railroad Association coordinates the activities of volunteers throughout the state as it documents Underground Railroad sites. If you are interested in volunteering, joining, or becoming a volunteer with the organization, please visit our website at www.ohioundergroundrailroad.org, or call 614-868-1246.

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The Ohio Department of Transportation

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) oversees the River-to-Lake Freedom Trail in Ohio to memorialize one of the most frequently-used corridors of the Underground Railroad (UGRR). ODOT has an extensive network of trails used by anti-slavery activists, free Blacks and churches to help fugitive slaves flee from the South to Canada. Ohio had one of the most active UGRR operations in the nation, with 40,000 slaves escaping to freedom through Ohio in the years before the Civil War.

In the year 2000, U.S. Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater bestowed a federal "Millenium Trail" designation on Ohio's network of scenic routes for runaway slaves. The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) took the designation one step further, designing portions of U.S. Route 25 and State Route 4—one of the most frequently used corridors on the Underground Railroad—at a commemorative highway to be known as River-To-Lake Freedom Trail.

The River-To-Lake Freedom Trail generally follows the present-day alignment of U.S. Route 23 from the Ohio River at Portsmouth, north through central Ohio. North of Marion County the trail follows state Route 4 to Sandusky on the shore of Lake Erie.

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The Crossing at Scioto County

Ohio's Crossroads of the Underground Railroad

Crawford County

During the Civil War, Crawford County was a safe haven for runaway slaves who used the railroad in their journey to freedom. Local farms and households, including the Marsh's Tavern, offered refuge to those fleeing slavery. The town of Worthington was a significant stop on the Underground Railroad, with the first documented station established in 1821.

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The Underground Railroad in Crawford County

A mansion in the center of Worthington served as a stop on the Underground Railroad. It was a safe haven for runaway slaves who used the railroad in their journey to freedom. Local farms and households, including the Marsh's Tavern, offered refuge to those fleeing slavery. The town of Worthington was a significant stop on the Underground Railroad, with the first documented station established in 1821.

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