

# THE HISTORICAL TIMES

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## EVENTS FOLLOWING THE GRANVILLE RIOT

### Granville Becomes a Station on The Great Northwestern Underground Railroad

The Summer issue of *The Historical Times* contained, along with Henry Howe's account of the Granville riot of 1836, the first two chapters of a novella dealing with these events in the history of Granville. This Autumn issue concludes the saga of Nellie Oakes, the young student from the Granville Female Seminary who was radicalized by the Abolitionist convention held in the "Hall of Freedom" at Ashley Bancroft's barn on North Street, then just beyond the Granville Village limits, and the ensuing Granville Riot. We follow Nellie through her work with the Abolitionist Cause in Cincinnati and her return to Granville to become a conductor on the Great Northwestern Underground Railroad. The story ends as the War of Rebellion begins in the 1860's.



1. CINCINNATI IN 1841

From Charles *Gist*, *Cincinnati in 1841* (Cincinnati, 1841), frontispiece.

THE COMING OF AGE  
OF NELLIE OAKES

MEGAN CATHERINE LISSKA

[Concluded from the Summer Issue of  
*The Historical Times.*

**Chapter Three**

A light wind blew gently over the rolling hills, as Nellie surveyed the farmland. It had been a good spring, with the right amount of rainfall and no damaging cold snaps. All signs on this June morning pointed toward a bountiful harvest come fall.

Fourteen years had passed since the now legendary Granville riot. It was early in the summer of 1850, and Nellie had seen and done much since that fateful day.

She had not forgotten that William Whitney owed her a great favor. Upon her commencement from the Granville Female Academy, and his simultaneous one from Granville College, she had convinced him, with no little effort, to take her with him to Cincinnati, where he planned to write for James Birney's newspaper. Whitney had not wanted her to go.

"This business is no place for a woman," he had argued one evening in May of that year. "We don't run things like a finishing school, you know. You've got to be willing to work harder than you ever have before, harder than you ever knew you could. I plan to go far beyond newspaper work in my fight for the cause."

But Nellie had stood her ground.

"I realize that," she had answered firmly, "and I wouldn't even ask you to take me if I didn't know exactly what I was getting myself into. But, William, I don't want to spend the rest of my life being pretty to look at." Her eyes began to burn with the indignation of an idealistic youth who has discovered the existence of injustice. Her voice grew more impassioned as

she cried, "I believe in this cause just as strongly as you do. Slavery is a crime against humanity, that no man, woman or child should be forced to endure. Finally, we as rational beings are beginning to fight against it. Please give me the means to join that fight, to add my small talents to the pool. You heard Mr. Thorne's speech at the convention -- this is exactly the sort of thing he was urging women to do!"

"Thorne didn't know what he was saying. He doesn't have a nagging woman in his household," William muttered under his breath.

Nellie had persisted, however, and with many eloquent pleas had worn him down.

"All right!" he had succumbed after one particularly grandiose entreaty. "You win. I'll take you, but you'll never survive."

Nellie had smiled to herself, and hurried home to make the arrangements.

The hardest part of the plan had been telling Henry that she must leave. It was even more difficult than she had imagined. Since the day of the riot, it had become his habit to call upon her in the evenings, and they had spent many a quiet time together on the front porch, or taking long walks along the secluded paths that led through the woods around their houses. During these times, she had told him of her convictions, and he had listened in admiration to this woman who looked so soft yet had a will of iron. Though he could not put his thoughts into words as eloquently as she, he possessed many of the same beliefs, and had vowed to fight the scourge of slavery in any way his modest means allowed. But now this fight to which he adhered so strongly threatened to take away the one thing he loved most, his sweet Nell.

He had broken stride, a stricken look on his face, when she told him her plans. Quickly, he sat down on a fallen log to hide the quivering of his limbs.

"You're leaving?" he could barely utter the words. "For how long?"

"I don't know, Henry," she had answered as gently as she could. Somehow, she had not foreseen the tears that were welling in his eyes, nor the matching ones in her own. Suddenly, Granville did not seem such a stifling town, and she wondered at her own eagerness to leave it.

"Don't you see? This is something that I must do for myself. I may be only a woman, but that shouldn't stop me from fighting for the things I believe in, even if it means sacrificing -- " she paused, overcome with a surprised sadness at their imminent parting, "the...the things I love the most."

Looking down at the moss beneath her feet, she could not bring herself to meet his wondrous gaze at first. But she heard his voice.

"Do you love me, Nell?" he asked, his voice almost breaking. "Because I love you more than...more than...aw, I don't know anything except that I love you." He pulled her down on the log beside him. "I know that once you set your mind to something, come hell or high water you ain't gonna change it, so I won't even bother askin' you to stay and marry me." He stopped, searching for the perfect phrase. "I ain't going to forget you though, Nell."

"Oh, Henry, I don't plan to forget you either!" she cried as she threw her arms around him. The tears fell freely now from both pairs of eyes. "It won't be forever, you know. I just want to do something meaningful before I settle down. But that doesn't mean I never will."

"When you do," Henry had answered with conviction, "I'll be right here waiting."

William and Nellie had endured the dusty stagecoach ride to Cincinnati, though to say that they had enjoyed polite conversation along the way would be unfair hyperbole. William could not resist warning his companion that he would not be able to aid her in the job ahead of them, as their respective ranges of talent lay on opposite sides of such an expansive and bleak abyss.

"I expect that Birney will give me a senior position on the paper," he had boasted. "Did I tell you how impressed he was with the speech I wrote for the convention?"

"Many times." Nellie had answered resignedly, not removing her gaze from the farmland outside the window.

"I hope he'll give you a spot," he had continued with mock concern. "But, you know how it is, you being a woman and all..."

"Well see," was Nellie's only reply.

They had alighted downtown to find a servant of Mr. Birney's waiting for them. Having met William at the convention, Birney truly had been impressed by his talents for both leadership and oratory, though not quite to the extent which the young man had led himself to believe. Birney had urged him to come to Cincinnati, however, and had welcomed the inclusion of Nellie, even if William had not. They arrived to find that suitable rooms in a respectable neighborhood had been leased for both of them.

After freshening up a bit, Nellie and William had made the short walk to Birney's home. Entering through an ornate pair of doors, Nellie had been more than a little surprised to see a multitude of muskets and shotguns on the landing of the front stairs. Noticing more loaded firearms at strategic locations throughout the house as they were led by another servant to the parlor, she had remarked to William that it seemed as though Birney had paranoically turned his house into an arsenal.

"He does worry quite a bit, although I'd hardly call it paranoia," William answered. "The newspaper staff is habitually receiving threats on their lives, you know." He paused in order to gauge Nellie's reaction to this tidbit of information. But Nellie, suspecting that he would test her thus, had resolved long before to show no fear.

"I expected as much," she had said quite calmly, though her heart had skipped a beat at his words.

There was no time for further conversation. However, as they had reached the drawing room where James Gillespie Birney awaited. An imposing man, he had made quite a name for himself in abolitionist circles, and the two newcomers were more than a little in awe of his personage.

"Welcome, friends!" he had exclaimed in a hearty voice upon their entrance. Wasting no time, he proceeded to tell them of his work, and the part they were to play in it.

"I am by no means what you would call a radical, you know," he had begun. "I've been a member at one time or another of almost every school of thought that exists concerning the matter of slavery. I was born and raised in Danville, Kentucky, and never gave a second thought to the Negro slaves that my family and neighbors owned. Even while I was a student at Princeton, supposedly gaining my worldly education, I truly saw the institution of slavery as a necessary evil, beneficial to the southern economy. You see, I had never experienced the cruelty and hardship faced by slaves on the mammoth plantations in the deeper south. Kentucky slave owners had a tendency -- and still do, by the way -- to treat their slaves more as preferred servants than property. The slaves I had known in my childhood were generally content, and thus I saw no wrong.

"After my graduation, I removed myself to Alabama, where I foresaw a prosperous future for myself in the planting business. My family had quite a sizable land holding there, which I was more than eager to take charge of. The enterprise required a large number of Negro slaves, which I summarily bought and treated well, as I had seen them treated in my childhood.

"Sadly, though, it is not always so. When I found need to go into town, I was often moved by the dramas I witnessed at that dread event known as the slave-auction. Families, just like yours and mine, torn apart by the whims of their masters. I cannot tell you how many times I longed to dry the tears of a young woman who had seen her husband sold, or the tears of mere children cruelly torn from their parents. As a

member of the Alabama legislature, I urged the passage of bills to improve the lot of the slaves. But even this was not enough to overcome the terrible wrongs being committed. All these observations caused me to seriously ponder the question of human bondage, and after much thought, I decided that slavery, the ownership of one human by another, is not only a cruel institution but a moral wrong."

He paused, as tea was brought in by the servant. Helping himself to a small cake, he continued.

"Early on, I thought that colonization might be the answer to the dilemma. Slaves could be freed and sent back to their native land, I reasoned, and then the problem of adapting them to free life in America could be avoided. I even became an agent for the American Colonization Society, and petitioned the United States Congress for funding to purchase additional land in Liberia, Africa. But I soon realized that this was no solution. How could we manage to transport thousands of Negroes across the sea, even if we had received help from the government? It was just as well that the project was doomed, since there were few Negroes who were willing to go. Now that I think of it, I suppose it was a foolish idea, expecting American-born slaves to readily adapt to the culture of a strange land more easily than to a better situation in their own. And yet, there still are a great number of ardent colonizationists around."

Nellie and William both acknowledged that statement, remembering the antics of a mob of colonizationists on one April afternoon in downtown Granville.

"But I ramble," Birney continued. "I freed my slaves, and saw to it that they were established in secure situations. I then returned to Kentucky, still a slave state, but one in which I assumed freedom of speech still existed. Apparently I was wrong. It was here that I began my newspaper enterprise, publishing the first issue of *The Philanthropist*."

Nellie nodded in recognition of the name of the publication which had brought her to Cincinnati.

"My intent was for the paper to be a proponent of the anti-slavery cause, but as I have mentioned before, I am not an extremist. I welcomed arguments from my opposition, remembering that it had not been too long before that I had agreed with them. Somehow, though, my neighbors in Danville did not appreciate my efforts. I was harassed to the point that I could not in safety continue my work, and could not practically continue to publish, since my printer had been confiscated. I moved once again, this time to Cincinnati.

"Here, I perform my tasks in relative peace. Oh, we have run into opposition many a time -- the office has been ransacked and on occasion I have been the object of dastardly threats, but I take precautions and have come to no harm." Here he had nodded toward the double-barreled shotgun that lay beside his chair. Nellie realized that this man was perfectly sane, and had justification for storing ammunition in his household as he did.

"Now then, this is where the two of you enter the picture." James Birney smiled. He was always glad to see young people, who were stereotyped as being so apathetic and uninterested in current affairs, take an interest in this important cause. "I understand that you can write?"

"Yes." William had hurriedly answered for both of them. "I've done extensive writing during my college career, and..."

"And I've had similar experience in my schooling." Nellie had cut in, not about to be outdone by her traveling companion.

"Good, good," Birney had murmured, rubbing his hands together in satisfaction. "And have you any publication experience?"

William for once was silent. Nellie took over.

"No, sir," she answered, "but I'd certainly be willing to learn. And I'm sure William would too," she had added with a barely detectable tone of satisfaction. Whitney had not dared to

comment, hoping his complete lack of knowledge on the subject was not readily apparent.

"I'm glad to see such spunk in a lass!" cried Birney. "I'll start you both at the same level, then. Be at the office of *The Philanthropist* at nine o'clock sharp."

And he hurried away continuing his never-ending work.

Nellie adapted to her work quickly. Neither she nor William had been assigned to any task of a literary bent at first, but had been put to work sweeping, dusting, and generally keeping the office in order. Occasionally, they had been allowed to check a proof for errors, or to help set type on the large printer. Nellie had expected such menial work at first, and performed it with gusto. William, on the contrary, was not so content with his tasks. He had almost expected to receive an editorship upon his arrival in the city, and could barely bring himself to sweep the floors with any sort of feeling or energy. Nellie was brought close to pity for the boy.

"This can't last too long," she had tried to console him after a particularly long and tiring day, as they walked toward their boarding-house. "Why don't you write something in the evening, and show it to Mr. Birney? I'm sure he'll be willing to print it."

Though the idea had occurred to William before, he had thought it useless. Surprised to find the same notion brewing in the mind of his co-worker, he looked at her with a hint of admiration.

"I just might do that," he said.

And he did. Every night for a week, he labored over his treatise, extolling the merits of abolitionism and severely criticizing slave owners for their sins. Unbeknownst to him, however, Nellie was also producing a piece of writing. She joined him one morning with a sheaf of papers under her arm.

"Oh, these are just some thoughts I had the other night, after hearing Mr. Coffin speak," she had said offhandedly in answer to his question. The entire newspaper staff had taken their meal at the Birney residence the previous evening, where the guest of honor had been the illustrious Levi Coffin, known in abolitionist circles as "President of the Underground Railroad." He had both interested and entertained them with tales of fugitive slaves who had sought refuge at his home in Newport, Kentucky, on their way to freedom. The stories they had to tell of plantation life, he had said, were at once fascinating and horrifying. Nellie had been entranced by the different facets of southern society, both the patriarchal and picturesque view of slave ownership, and the abominations of its cruel practices. Returning to her room, she simply transcribed the stories he told, giving their characters a singular warmth and personality. After sufficiently polishing the work, she decided to put it to good use.

She presented her article to Mr. Birney that morning, and garnered a fair amount of praise from him the same afternoon. It was unusual for him to take writing from a woman, he said, but not because of any gender prejudice on his part. There were just so few females who had the courage to submit their writings for publication. After seeing Nellie's piece, he added, he heartily wished there were more like her. The work, entitled "The Toils of the Negro, or Stories from the Other Side" would be published in the following week's *Philanthropist*, he promised.

William, as one would guess, was rather surprised at Nellie's coup, but was not terribly worried by her success. He brought in his own work the next day, and presented it with a flourish to Mr. Birney.

"This is quite good," the editor had said. "Quite good. A little preachy, perhaps, but with some cutting it will do nicely to fill in the space at the bottom of the third page."

So, as it happened, the following week both Granvillites found their literary efforts rewarded with publication. It was Nellie's article,

however, that had the space of honor on the front page.

*The Philanthropist* had a rather large underground following in Cincinnati, and Nellie soon found herself in demand, both professionally and socially, as she published articles more and more frequently. She often received invitations to luncheons and social gatherings, occasionally tendered by other female writers in the area. One of these was the former Harriet Beecher, recently married to Professor Calvin Stowe. Though her family was a noted one, the new couple was entrenched in poverty, and Harriet had been attempting to support herself and her husband by writing various and eclectic essays. The Professor was in Europe at the time, so Harriet had busied herself with helping her brother, the well-known Henry Ward Beecher, edit *The Cincinnati Inquirer*. She and Nellie found that they had much in common, and spent many an hour in animated conversation.

"I have a great amount of respect for you, Nellie dear," Harriet said during one of these talks. "We both earn our living by guiding the placement of words on paper, but I suspect that your words are the immortal ones, while my poor efforts have their effect only on my own generation." Such a statement was characteristic of the humble Harriet, but not entirely founded. She published amid much praise a geography textbook just four years before, and demonstrated that her talents were many in number.

"I don't see the truth to that, Hattie," Nellie had answered in all honesty. "Your gifts are just as substantial as mine, and I see no reason why you shouldn't in the future write some work far more revolutionary than any I have produced."

Her words were prophetic.

"Perhaps I will...perhaps I will," came the dreamy reply.

As the months passed, Nellie grew comfortable in the city, and as she published more and more frequently, her enjoyment of her work grew in

proportion. William had garnered many publications to his credit as well. Instead of resenting Nellie's greater success, he was charitable enough to attribute it to her gender rather than her talent, and even grew to have something approaching respect for her. The antagonism between them had dwindled, and eventually blossomed into a working friendship. Nellie was happy that she was using her talents wisely, and was gratified by the thought that her writing was actually influencing many of the dignitaries of Cincinnati, who would never admit to reading the underground newspaper, but eagerly devoured every issue just the same.

Alas, all this was soon to end. In late 1837, James Birney was offered the position of executive secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Thinking that the wider scope of that institution would produce the greater good, he hurriedly folded his newspaper business and headed for New York City. Nellie had stayed on in Cincinnati for a year, but without the medium of *The Philanthropist* had found it difficult indeed to induce any publication to accept her work. William was thinking of moving east, to a larger city such as Boston or Philadelphia where hot-headed abolitionists were running rampant. Nellie had been a little surprised to find herself saddened at the prospect of his departure, and was beginning to wonder if perhaps she herself should leave as well. But before she had brought herself to any sort of decision, William had presented her with a surprising option.

One afternoon, he had come to her door and asked her to accompany him on a walk along the banks of the Ohio River. "It's such a beautiful day, I can't bear to remain inside," he had explained. This was rather unusual, as William Whitney had never been one to notice the beauty of nature. But Nellie had been all too happy to join him, as it was truly a gorgeous and balmy autumn afternoon.

Strolling leisurely, they had come to a shady knoll just above the city. William suggested that they sit down.

"Nellie," he had begun, uncomfortable being in the rare position of not knowing just what to say. "You know I'm planning to leave Cincinnati before the holidays. I have a cousin in Boston who runs a small paper, and he has offered me its editorship, as he would like to retire. It's a plum position, and I think I could be quite successful with it."

"Yes," Nellie had answered, "and I shall be sorry to see you go. I've enjoyed your companionship during these years."

"As I have enjoyed yours," William had answered with a grin. "We didn't start out that well, did we? But we managed to pull through."

He paused, and Nellie had remained silent, wondering where the conversation was headed. She had not needed to wait long.

"Here's what I'm trying to say, Nellie. I'm leaving on the first of November. I'd like you to come with me."

Nellie was too astonished to speak. William had hurriedly continued.

"I know it won't be easy at first. My cousin's newspaper hasn't been doing well, and it will take some effort to turn it around. But I know it can be done. I'll be successful, Nellie! Just think, you won't have to write another word!"

Nellie, who had been entertaining the prospect in her mind, was stopped short by the last phrase.

"But William, I love to write! I'd never stop, not even if I married and raised fifteen children! There are still so many articles and essays I have yet to produce!"

"Nonsense," William had scoffed. "No wife of mine will have to work for a living!"

Nellie had begun to use the age old time buyer: "This is such a surpr--" but then she had stopped and straightened. She had met William's gaze with her own clear one and had answered with a steady voice.

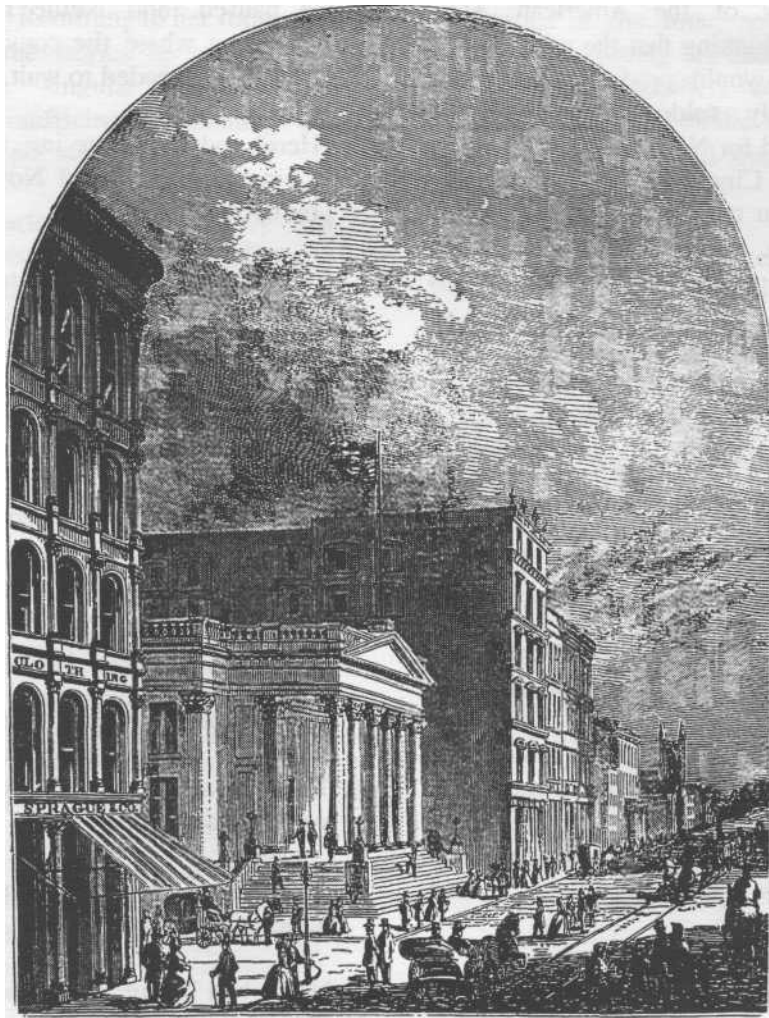
"William, I'm sorry, but I can't marry you. You deserve a wife who will cherish you, and devote her life to furthering your career. I would certainly stand by you and work with you to strengthen this newspaper, but not at the expense of my own writing. I am sorry."

As William had gazed across the gently flowing Ohio, Nellie had laid her hand on his.

"I wish you all the luck in the world, William," she whispered. "Somehow, I am sure that it will be yours."

Lying in her bed that night, Nellie had relived

that conversation in her mind. What was it, exactly, that had caused her to be so positive that she had made the right choice? William was attractive enough, and life with him would surely not be too difficult. It was not even that she would have to give up her writing, although that had played a large role in her decision. No, she had realized, it was none of these things. In asking her to spend her life at his side, William had never once said that he loved her. And, in the darkness, Nellie had remembered another proposal, this one occurring on a fallen log in the woods of Granville. She had smiled to herself, and realized what was missing in her life. It was time to go back home.



FOURTH STREET, CINCINNATI, FEB. 2, 1858.

The above view was drawn by J. W. Barber for "Historical Collections, U. S.," by J. W. Barber and Henry Howe. The building with Grecian front was occupied as Post-office and Custom House now the site of the Chamber of Commerce. Mitchell & Rammelsburg's furniture and Shillito's dry goods establishments and the tower of the Unitarian Church appear beyond.



## Chapter Four

And so Nellie returned to Granville, where Henry, true to his word, was waiting. They married the following spring, and settled comfortably on the acres that Henry's father, Theophilus Little, a prosperous horse-breeder, had given them as a wedding present. Nellie continued to write, diligently sending stories, essays, and articles to various periodicals, and accepting the royalties and rejection slips as they came. She did have to slow down her pace a bit, becoming not quite as prolific as she spent time with their children. It was a sacrifice she did not mind in the least.

Though Nellie used her literary talents a little less freely in the years that followed, she and Henry found another, just as helpful means of supporting the cause they both still adhered to strongly.

Before leaving Cincinnati, Nellie met again with Levi Coffin. Telling him of her plans to relocate, she had asked him if she, upon setting up a household in Granville, could become involved in the widely growing enterprise known as the Underground Railroad.

"I couldn't even tell you the names of the operators in your area, Miss Oakes," Coffin said. "This business is highly clandestine, you know, so those involved in it really are aware of only a few others who are sympathetic to the cause and to whom they can turn for help. I would advise you, though, to go to a meeting of whatever abolitionist or anti-slavery society you have in your town. There is no better way to become knowledgeable about what you can do to help the cause and who you can depend on to help you help that cause."

Nellie had grimaced visibly, remembering the reaction that a previous anti-slavery society had caused in Granville. But she returned to her hometown with an open mind, and found to her surprise that attitudes there had changed tremendously in the two years she had been absent.

After the fiasco of a meeting of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society in 1836, a marked number of people were extremely embarrassed to have witnessed such a scene in their town, known throughout the state for its elegance and sophistication. Thus, they had resolved to let the abolitionists have their say, with no further egg-throwing or other such antics. In fact, the feelings of the citizenry broadened to such a degree that when the state society, obviously suffering from a considerably short memory when it came to public reaction to their doings, had asked the dignitaries of Granville for permission to hold the third annual convention in town, the Congregational Church was opened to them with no hindrances whatsoever.

Although small enclaves of ardent colonizationists had continued to exist in and around Granville, by 1840 the town had become widely abolitionist. Colonizationism as a theory had been steadily losing its following in other communities as well, as its followers began to realize, like James Birney had long before, that it just was neither economically nor practically feasible to ship freed slaves to Africa.

"It's rather like sending me back to France," Nellie had been heard to comment at a local abolitionist society meeting a year after her return, "just because my maternal great-grandmother was born in Paris! And me hardly remembering a phrase of the language besides 'Je mange la baguette'!" This had elicited a laugh, along with a gently reproving glance from the former Miss Bridges, who had married Mr. Gilmore and had moved with him to a farm just outside of Jacksontown, ten miles to the south. Mrs. Gilmore was still active in anti-slavery activities, and attended the Granville meetings whenever time and distance allowed.

It was after this meeting that Nellie had approached her one-time teacher.

"Mrs. Gilmore, have you heard of an organization known as the Underground Railroad?" she asked in hushed tones. Mrs. Gilmore had taken one look into Nellie's earnest face and suggested that the two of them sit down

with her husband and discuss the matter. This accomplished, Mr. Gilmore spoke.

"My wife tells me, Nellie, that while you were away you had the chance to meet with Levi Coffin," he began.

"Why, yes!" she answered. "In fact, his stories were the inspiration for the very first article I wrote for *The Philanthropist*."

"Then I am sure you must know something of our work in assisting fugitive slaves to freedom."

"Your work?" Nellie had asked. "You mean..."

"Yes, dear," his wife had broken in, "we have been 'conductors', as Mr. Coffin himself calls them, since just after our marriage."

"Can you tell me exactly what your task is?"

"It's actually quite simple, although the element of danger, which is considerable, is enough to offset any relief we get from its lack of difficulty." Miss Bridges went on: "Sometimes, we get word from our good neighbor, seventeen miles to the south, that a group of fugitives are being hidden at his home or in his barn. Early the next morning, long before the cock crows, he arrives at our house with a wagon load of Negroes, hidden carefully under loads of hay or some other goods. If there are no slave agents from the south asking awkward questions, though, it is common for us to have no such warning. And if there is only one male slave, traveling alone, often he will be sent to us with no guidance save directions to our homestead. Imagine, these men are escaping from lives of bondage under immense cruelty, stealing through the night, hoping they will find the next friendly house before being spotted by slave hunters."

Nellie smiled, remembering the old familiar drama of Miss Bridges' speeches. But recognizing the seriousness of her old teacher's tale, she suddenly turned to the couple.

"Henry couldn't be here tonight," she said. "One of the hands is ill, and we've had our hands full with the extra chores around the farm. But we were discussing this very topic last evening, and we decided it was important that I come. We want to help. We have plenty of room, and I believe we're far enough from the center of town that we shouldn't arouse too much suspicion."

Gilmore's face had taken on a grave countenance.

"You realize, don't you, that in the minds of many, and according to southern law, you are stealing the valuable property of others."

Nellie shuddered at the thought.

"Yes," she answered firmly. "And that is exactly why I must do this."

"You realize that you may be putting yourself, your husband, and your future family in jeopardy, should this abomination called slavery last so long."

"Yes, we've discussed the dangers."

"Well then, I'll introduce you to the man who can help you more than I can."

Gilmore led Nellie to Edwin C. Wright, the head of the society and her own neighbor. The next evening, Wright paid a solemn call to the Little household, where the particulars of the business were discussed. Nellie and Henry Little became full-fledged conductors on the Great Northwestern Underground Railroad.

From that week on, they welcomed fugitives into their home, giving them shelter in the barn, or in their spacious cellar. Nellie provided tasty food for all these dark skinned visitors. She enjoyed the mealtimes best of all, for then in the wee hours of the morning, she could question the escaping slaves of their lives south of the Ohio River. Often, the tales they told her were transcribed the next day, and became the basis for her latest essay or story.

The Gilmores were correct in warning the Littles of the dangers. Many a morning, Nellie would open her door to steely-eyed agents of southern masters, asking the whereabouts of the very fugitives who were at that moment lying motionless in the hayloft behind the house, scarcely daring to breathe. Nellie grew adept at throwing these human bloodhounds off the scent, and the Littles were rarely suspected of playing a large role in the movement. Even if the agents did come up with circumstantial evidence pointing toward the white farmhouse on Centerville Street, it was very difficult to obtain a search warrant in the now heavily abolitionist village of Granville.

And eleven years had passed. Nellie stood now on the hill, watching as eight year old Henry, called Hank to avoid family confusion, ran home from the rather unusual octagon-shaped schoolhouse nearby. She had been worried about sending him to school so young, when he had started in the early spring, but he was a precocious youngster, and had badly wanted to go. It had also been a prudent method of ensuring that he would be away from the house during the crucial daylight hours, when he might discover the hidden slaves, or innocently divulge information to the crafty agents.

As she watched her son come toward her, Nellie's eyes scanned the southern horizon, as she wondered what individuals would come from that direction tonight. She had seen Mrs. Gilmore the afternoon before, picking up the mail downtown. The two women seldom saw each other, as it was unusual for the Gilmores to make the long trek to Granville, and they enjoyed the rare chance to catch up on one another's doings. During the conversation, the older woman had warned Nellie that she and her husband were sending a wagon load of fugitives to the east side of Granville that night. They kept them for four days, she said, and dared not conceal them longer for fear of discovery. Although agents had been rampant in Licking County for the past weeks, it was dangerous to keep the same group of slaves for more than a few nights.

It appeared that a busy night was approaching. Nellie was more than a little worried. The summer months always brought a heavier onslaught of fugitives, as well as their agents. The Littles had weathered many summers before this one, and Nellie had no fears of their capability to handle whatever obstacle fortune should throw their way. But she could not help thinking that her government had betrayed her. To lessen the unbalancing effect of California entering the union as a free state, Congress had voted into law the stringent Fugitive Slave Act, which made any aiding and abetting of escaping slaves a federal offense, harshly punishable by law. Nellie and Henry had no intentions of lessening their involvement, but Nellie did worry about her children. Their daughter Daisy was reaching the age where she would notice and question the strange goings-on in her home, yet was still too young to be trusted to keep still about what she saw. And Henry a few nights before suggested that Hank ride with him in the evenings when he transported the fugitives, covered well with burlap and straw, to the abode of Gershom Griffith only a mile away. Henry did not often drive the wagons all the way to Utica or Mt. Vernon, always the next stops on the journey northward. All area conductors congregated every few nights at the Griffith farm, from whence Gershom or one of his brothers drove all of the former slaves in one or two crowded wagons. The presence of Hank, Henry reasoned, playing among the straw, would mislead any suspicious agents. It was a clever thought, Nellie agreed, but she was worried about exposing her boy to the operation. No matter how worthy the cause, she and her husband were as of this year breaking a federal law. And though she stood firm in her convictions, she wanted her children to grow up to be law-abiding citizens. How could she explain this aberration to such young ears? Soon she would have younger ears still to teach, as all signs seemed to indicate that there would be a third Little child in the house by Christmas.

Yes, it would be a busy evening. Jane Linnell, the wife of Joseph, the neighboring farmer, rung her dinner-bell that day with four short, sharp jerks instead of lengthy tolls, indicating that four fugitives hid in her attic. The merchants in town

had been questioned by the ever multiplying agents, which meant that Dr. Bancroft would send any fugitives at his dwelling westward to Granville's outskirts as soon as possible. His sympathies toward abolitionism were widely known throughout the sun-ounding areas, and his brick home was always the first target of the slave hunters swarming through town.

She was correct in her guess. Just after dusk, Dr. Bancroft's familiar wagon pulled into the yard and around the house toward the back door. Henry ran out, and as quickly as possible scuttled the five fugitives into the kitchen, where Nellie had prepared more food than usual that afternoon. Not many hours had passed before a lone black man hesitantly rapped at the back door, and was likewise given shelter. And before the night was over, the wagon load that Mrs. Gilmore had warned of arrived, driven by her husband.

No less than ten fugitives were set to spend at least the next day with the Littles.

"It never rains, but it pours," muttered Henry to his wife when the newest wagon load pulled in. Truly, this was the largest number they had ever had to care for in one night. Ten could easily sleep in the large loft of the barn, but it was far too numerous a crowd to keep together during the day. They would have to split up come dawn.

Nellie, explaining this to the grateful fugitives as they ate a warm meal, saw a large, dark woman, identified only as Louise, place her arms protectively about her two children. Glad that her own children were asleep upstairs, Nellie listened to her story, spurred by a plea that they not be separated.

They had left their plantation in Alabama weeks before, when the oldest boy had been sold.

"My husband was sold down the river last fall," said Louise, "and I promised myself then that me and my children, we gonna stay together till they tears us apart." They left, she went on, when her oldest boy was sold to a faraway master who had a particular reputation for

cruelty. Stealing through the night, they proceeded this far relatively unscathed, having a few close brushes with the authorities. Louise's most fervent dream was to arrive safely in Canada, where she and her children could finally live a life free from pursuit. She had given up hope of seeing her husband again, she explained with tears in her eyes, as there were no means of sending the message to him that they were leaving without risking capture before they even started out. Such a story, Nellie realized long ago, was only typical of the hardships faced by her fellow humans in the south.

John, the lone traveler, came from southern Kentucky, where he escaped only two or three weeks before. He had been sheltered by a fellow slave on a large farm bordering the Ohio river. Favored slaves in this area were often trusted implicitly and given privileges by their owners to row across the river for various business, and this John's friend had done, with John aboard. When they had reached the free soil on the opposite bank, John urged his companion to join him in his flight.

"No," he answered, "I am happy here. My master treats me nice, and I have a roof over my head and food to eat. I'll stay here to help my brothers like you pass through." And he stayed, even though given the perfect opportunity to leave the boat stranded and follow the increasingly traveled trail to the north.

By far the most unusual tale came from the spry little mulatto girl who arrived with the others in the Gilmore's wagon. Hailing from Tennessee, she remembered no family, but had been the special pet of an elderly lady on a small plantation. For years she had been entrusted with the care of her mistress' hair and clothing, and had been treated well accordingly. But the old woman died, and her estate did not provide for her small servant. Rather than be sold to work in the cotton fields, of which she knew nothing save its hardships, she struck out on her own to find freedom. Though her demeanor and speech suggested an age of at least twelve years, her body was small and undeveloped enough to easily be mistaken for nine. Her name was Sally.

Sally, on her travels, had befriended an amiable tramp with the unlikely name of Cornfield. Cornfield made his living by carrying an immense pack on his back, and would travel from farm to farm on a large circuit, peddling his wares to anyone who would buy. He had taken a liking to the spunky young fugitive, and his knowledge of the territory, derived from years of traversing it, proved him to be an invaluable comrade. They traveled together for a few weeks, becoming the respective father and daughter to each other that neither had known. When passing through a town with strong southern sentiments, or when agents were uncomfortably close by, Cornfield would empty his pack of its wares, place the thin girl inside it, and nimbly carry her on his back to a safe and secluded spot. There she would wait for him while he would go back, refill his pack, visit his scheduled farmhouses, and beg whatever scraps he could for them to eat.

Sally would have been happy to stay with Cornfield for years, and he enjoyed his sharp little traveling companion. But one day, the two had been spotted by an unsympathetic farm hand. The man notified an agent of the slave child who was accompanying the pack-peddler, and when Cornfield made a stop at the next rural town, he was sharply questioned. Sally, crouching in the depths of his pack, heard the rough voices describing exactly how they would abuse Cornfield should they ever find him helping a slave escape, and knew that she had grown to love this man too dearly to keep him in such danger. In the dark of the night, she crept away from the sleeping Cornfield, not daring to even bid him a fond farewell. Cautiously she stopped at the next farmhouse she came to that had three candles burning in the window, a sign she had learned meant that its inhabitants were friendly to the fugitive. It had happened to be the Gilmore homestead, and Sally was duly sent on to Granville.

Nellie eagerly wrote down these and other tales of a little laughter and much woe, all the while wondering at the trick of genetics that had led her to need not fear that her own children would suffer a similar fate.

The next morning, just before the light of dawn appeared over the horizon, Henry went next door to his father's home. He knew that old Theophilus was against the idea of slavery, though he was not an ardent abolitionist. But remembering that long ago day when his father had looked at the bobbed tail of his prized chestnut mare, listened to a silly story about a calf chewing it off, glanced at his son with a knowing look but let the matter drop, Henry had an idea that the elder Littles would be willing to aid their son in this emergency.

He was correct. Theophilus did not approve of bucking the law as his son was doing, but he no sooner wished to see his son or his favorite daughter-in-law imprisoned for their actions, so he agreed, in their time of need, to hide a few fugitives in his well-stocked cellar. In fact, the few who were chosen to move next door thought themselves the luckiest, for their underground hiding place also served as the family larder, and was supplied with multitudes of cheeses, meats, and cookies by the tin. These last especially were much appreciated by the hidden slaves.

The remaining fugitives were divided between Henry's barn and Nellie's cellar. All, that is, except Sally, who had taken a liking to Nellie and begged to be allowed to help her care for young Daisy. Nellie's heart overflowed for this young girl who had never known parental love, and, against her better judgment, agreed to keep Sally in the house for this one day.

But no sooner had Henry returned from settling his group of slaves in the barn than he heard a banging at the door. Nellie scurried Sally into a closet, and hurriedly shoved a bookcase against its door, while Henry argued with the persistent agents outside. Particularly rough, one of them managed to elbow his way inside the door, where he harassed the mild-mannered Henry. Nellie entered the room.

"What seems to be the problem here, sir?" she asked innocently.

"Well, Ma'am," the man answered, his tone suddenly sugared, "there've been reports of darkies in this neighborhood lately. Were just stoppin' in to make sure that none of you folks have any slaves hid anywheres."

Nellie was indignant. "How dare you accuse us of breaking the law! We'd do no such thing. Why don't you go on up Jones Road? I saw a group of them traveling that way this morning."

The man gave her a tolerant look.

"Now, Ma'am, you don't expect me to believe that, do you? Them Negroes don't never travel in the daylight -- even they aren't that stupid. Now why don't you tell me where you got them hid?" He took a threatening step toward her.

Henry moved quickly. Dealing the man a quick blow, he sent him reeling to the floor.

Nellie had run to get the shotgun, and quickly aimed it at the other two men, who were

entering to see what the commotion was about.

"Not another step," she pronounced threateningly, "or I shoot."

Glancing at their floored companion, the two decided not to trifle with this angry woman.

She motioned to the man on the floor. "Now you git!" she screamed, suddenly acquiring a country drawl, "And don't you never come here accusin' me of nothing, you hear! Git!" And, not comfortable staring into the musket barrel, and daring not to reach for his own gun, he slunk away without another word.

Henry gazed at his wife in utter amazement.

"When did you learn to act like that?" he asked.

But before she could answer with a characteristic pert phrase, she suddenly began to tremble uncontrollably. Weakened by her condition and realizing what a close call she had survived, her legs gave out from under her and she collapsed into Henry's surprised arms.



LYMAN BEECHER.

HARRIET BEECHER STOWCE.

## Chapter Five

Eleven more summers had come and gone, and the twelfth was half over as Nellie once again stood upon the hillside. To the unknowing<sup>s</sup> observer, it would seem that she was a different woman than the vibrant young mother who had watched her son run home so many years before. Nellie had been quite ill after her episode with the slave agents. She had been bedridden almost constantly until her second son was born early the following October. It had been a difficult childbirth, and the recovery was a slow and painful process. She regained much of her old strength in time, but she was forced to leave many of the farm chores to Henry, as caring for the baby Howard, who was sickly himself, took up most of her energy.

The Littles, of course, had not given up their labors for the Underground Railroad, though they slowed down quite a bit from the days of their youth. Younger and more energetic families now bore the brunt of the work, but it was known that Henry and Nellie were always willing to do what they could in an emergency. During the past two years, however, there had been no fugitives at all coming through. The union was bitterly at war with itself, and every family felt its pangs.

The years of hard work had taken their toll, and the worries that had accompanied them were now indelibly imprinted on Nellie's careworn face. She had known the joy of seeing her children grow strong and healthy, though, and took pleasure in their every action. Hank was now a strong lad of twenty. Two years before, when Company D of the 17th Ohio Volunteer Infantry marched out of Granville, Hank longed to join it. A fever drained his strength for many months, however, and he had only now returned to his former physique and stamina. Daisy was a very sweet sixteen, studying at the Granville Female Academy, and was capturing the hearts of the Denison men just as her mother had done at the same age. And Howie, now twelve, finally seemed to have outgrown his weak childhood and now put on a healthy glow.

The years witnessed their sorrows, as well. Henry's mother, the source of the marvelous cookies that kept four fugitive slaves so content one morning passed away soon after that incident, and the same fever that saved Hank from Shiloh had taken Nellie's beloved Mrs. Gilmore. Perhaps it was for the best, Nellie was thinking this Sunday morning, as she waited for her family to ready themselves for church, that Nancy Bridges Gilmore was not alive to see this scourge called war that so threatened the sanctity of the Union. Granvillites lived and breathed war these days, and so many of them read with fear every telegram from the front, praying that their loved ones would be on the list of those wounded -- anything but to see their names on that horrifying second list.

The Littles so far had been spared, Nellie reflected with thanks as the family walked into town. As they took their places in the family pew, she wondered how long such good fortune would last. Every other day, it seemed, news came of some local boy wounded or worse.

Even their worship service was not exempt from the issues of the day. Marvin Munson, yet another resident of Centerville Street, took the pulpit after the Reverend Jacob Little's fiery sermon, and exhorted the able young men of the congregation to enlist in "Granville's Own": Company D of the 113th Ohio Volunteers. Nellie involuntarily flinched at his words. She knew well enough the importance of this war. Their union army was fighting the same battle she herself spent the better part of her life waging on a smaller scale. But, oh, couldn't the war be won before it took her firstborn?

Hank entered her room that evening. Taking her now frail hands in his strong ones, he gave her his characteristic look of determination, the one he had inherited from his mother. His eyes had a twinge of sentiment in them, though, as he said

"Mother, you know that I'm going in."

She looked at him and simply nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

If there is one thing I've learned from you, Mother, it's that one must fight to the best of one's ability for the causes that one believes in. You know that I can't stay home while the Union is won or lost. I have to do what I can for the cause!"

Nellie looked into his eyes and saw reflected in them the same youthful idealism that had brimmed in her own, years ago when she had fought to convince a certain young man that the fight against injustice was worth the sacrifices one must make. In his voice she heard the words she herself uttered, sounding loud and clear through the years.

"...that shouldn't stop me from fighting for the things I believe in, even if it means sacrificing the things I love the most."

Yes, this was her son. She only hoped he realized just how great a sacrifice he was about to make. Squeezing his hands with as much strength as she could muster, she returned his clear gaze.

"I'm proud of you," was all she said.

The morning of August 12, 1862, dawned bright and clear, as Company D the 113th Ohio Volunteers marched down Broadway, two by two, many of them for the last time. When the first regiment had left Granville two years before, the atmosphere was strikingly different. The town assembled to see them off, cheering and waving, confident that they would return, each and every one, by the end of the season. This morning, though the entire town -- those who remained -- came out as before, the tone was solemn. Mothers, sisters, and sweethearts wept unashamedly, most of their lives already scarred by the faraway war. Unlike their predecessors, these young men had an idea of what lay ahead: Louisville, Chattanooga, Chickamauga. And yet the sun seemed to shine on them that morning, as they strode down the street to the beat of a drum.

Nellie's own eyes were clear that day. She had done her weeping alone, the night before and many nights before that. Now she stood beside

Henry, Daisy, and Howie, watching her eldest son stride before her for the final time, imprinting upon her mind his every movement, and knowing she would never forget how he looked that day. She could not help but mark, as she was sure Henry did too, as he marched off to battle, how much taller and more dignified these boys stood than the ones who marched to the beat of a different instrument almost thirty years before. They had come a long way since then, she realized, and though she did not know it, the fight to which she had devoted most of her life was very close to its end.

Nellie straightened, and smiled as Hank saluted her as he passed. Then she turned and watched, unblinking, as he marched off to continue the battle. She continued to watch until she could discern no more movement, until all there was left for her to see was the ever rising sun.



ROUTE STEP.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the process of undertaking research and writing this work, many individuals generously gave their time to help by providing suggestions, insight, and just general support. I would like to take the time and space to thank the most influential of them here, and I sincerely hope they realize that this project would not be what it is without their generosity.

Richard Shiels, Professor of History at The Ohio State University and former president of the Granville Historical Society, was extremely helpful in suggesting research materials. Moreover, Professor Shiels helped me realize that what we know to be history is often as much legend and folklore as it is fact. His insights made me extremely glad that I decided to write a work of fiction rather than an exhaustive historical study.

David Neel, an attorney in Newark, Ohio and treasurer of the Granville Historical Society, provided information on historical sites and supposed underground railroad stations in Granville and surrounding areas, many of which I had been previously unaware.

My parents, Tony and Marianne Lisska--my mother a History major as an undergraduate student and my father always interested in local historical issues--were generous as always in their unfailing support of this historical undertaking. Also, they gave up many an evening in proofreading and offering critiques of earlier drafts as well as driving around Licking County in search of documented, undocumented, suspected, and simply old historical houses and sites in Granville, Newark, and Utica.

And finally, Ms. Flo Hoffman, Archivist for Denison University and the Granville Historical Society, kindly served as my "on-site sponsor" for the project. Ms. Hoffman so generously volunteered her time to aid in every aspect of this undertaking. Her suggestions were extremely useful, and her knowledge of

Granville history proved to be invaluable. She deserves an extra-special note of thanks.

To all the aforementioned, and to those unnamed individuals who helped with suggestions or provided vital information. I extend my heartfelt gratitude.

Megan Catherine Lisska  
May, 1990: October, 1998

(Editor's Note: Megan Lisska, now in her fourth year of medical school at Yale University, wrote this novella as a senior project under Dr. Perry Rogers during her final year at The Columbus School for Girls.

### Coming in 1999...

Future Issues of *The Historical Times* will include reminiscences of growing up in Granville in the 1920's and 1930's by Robert C. Evans, who lived first on Granger Street and later on the Newark Granville Road with the golf course as his big back yard.

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**News From the President**

At the Society's annual banquet held on October 27, 1998 at the Presbyterian Church Hall in Granville, Maggie Brooks reported on various activities undertaken over the last few months. Maggie mentioned the following items:

- a. The Project 2005, which is the Society's publication project for the bi-centennial of our village, encompasses the writing and editing of a three volume set. The authors for Volume One are hard at work on their respective chapters. Volume Two will contain various vignettes on Granville life, people, and events. Volume Three will contain maps, photographs, and statistical data on our villa<sup>se</sup>.
- b. The Society's museum building on East Broadway needs additional space for the



archives and the installation of climate control devices to aid in preserving our collections.

c. The Board of Management is working towards establishing an endowment fund in order to support adequately future positions needed for a well developed history organization.

d. The Ohio Historical Society has approved an historical marker which will be placed on the grounds of the Old Academy Building. The funding for this marker comes from the following sources: one third from our Society; one third from the Ohio Historical Society, and one third from the Longaberger Foundation. Our appreciation to Cynthia Coil for writing and shepherding this application through the funding process.

e. The need for volunteers, especially docents, is particularly acute. John Kessler and Cynthia Cort, of the Society's Museum Committee, eagerly request that Society members consider seriously serving as docents during the 1999 museum season, which runs from April through October. A phone message may be left on the answering machine in the Museum: 587-3951.

The Museum will be open  
during the festive  
Christmas Walking Tour  
of downtown Granville  
Saturday evening,  
**December 5, 1998.**

Do visit the holiday decorated  
museum while strolling through  
Granville's scenic and historic  
downtown area.

**Annual Banquet has Four Part Program on the Granville Female College**

At the Autumn banquet, Society members Tony Stoneburner, Pat Stoneburner, Karen Graves and Lyn Robertson considered in some detail the historical significance of the education of women in Granville.

Tony Stoneburner, former president of the Society, traced the history of the Granville Female Seminary until its closing date in 1898 and Shepardson College until its formal union with Denison University in 1927.

Karen Graves gave an outline of the history of Denison, from its founding in 1831 as the "Granville Literary and Theological Institution." Karen noted that from its beginning, the institution was to "Christianize

the frontier" through providing: a) sound learning; b) correct morality; and c) viable non-sectarian religion.

Pat Stoneburner compared the curriculum of the Granville Literary and Theological Institution with what was offered in the Granville Female Seminary. Pat also noted six leaders in early feminist thought who had connections with what was commonly called "The Lower Sem."

Lyn Robertson gave an account of the daily life of the students with reference to the rather strict limitations placed on their daily conduct. Lyn referred to the "Granville Riot," which account was published in *The Historical Times* in the summer issue. Lyn also distributed two articles from the *Herbarium*, which was the school paper of the Granville Female College in the 1850's.

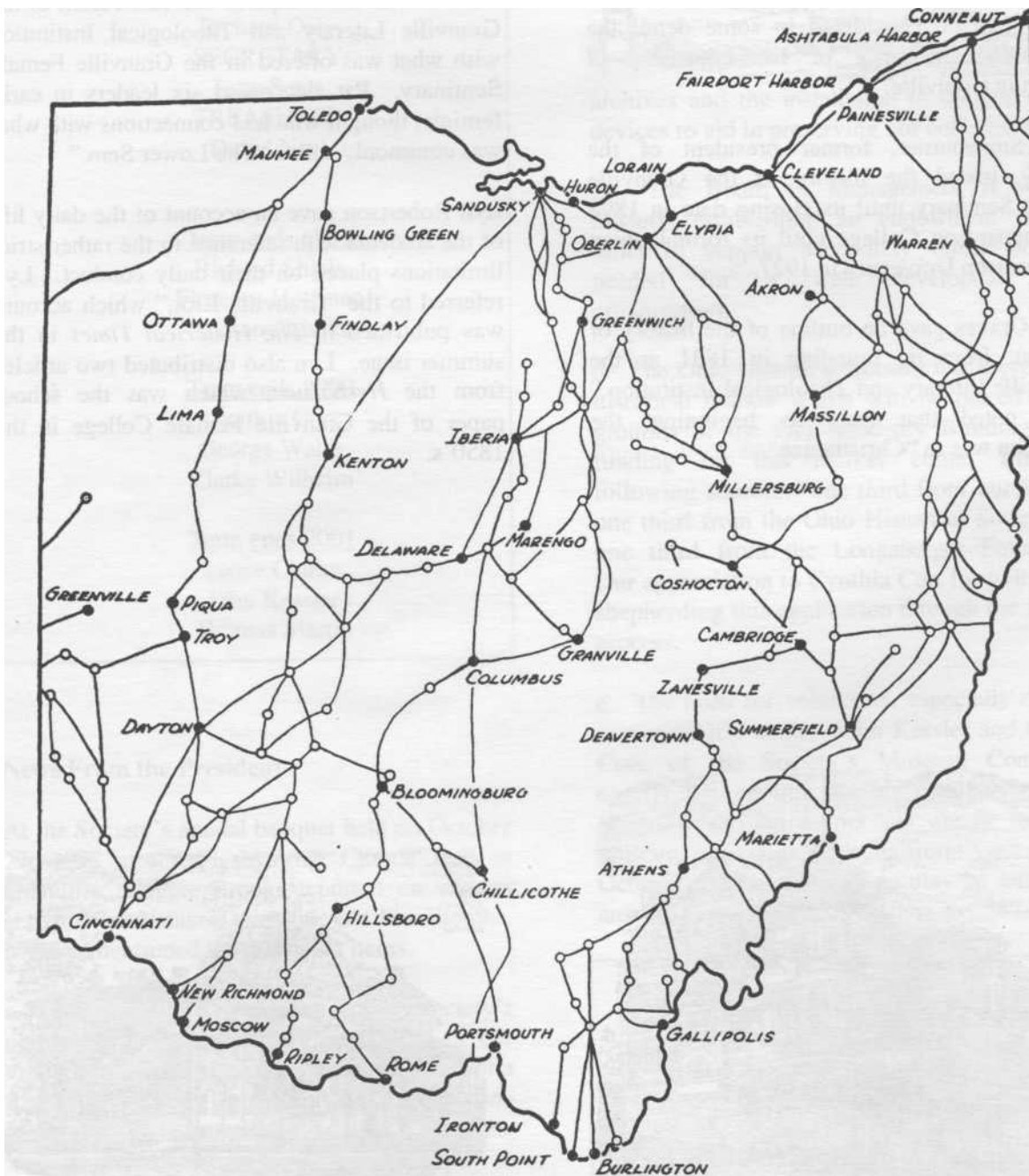


**SHEPARDSON'S COLLEGE FOR WOMEN.**



GRANVILLE FEMALE COLLEGE.

*From the Archives...*



MAP 13. THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN OHIO

Based upon a map in Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1898), fold. insert between p. 112-3.