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The Antislavery Movement in Clermont County

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THE ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT IN CLERMONT COUNTY

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

By
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B.A., Northern Kentucky University, 2005

2012
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ABSTRACT


The United States grappled with the question of slavery, that peculiar institution, for decades prior to the Civil War. One result of those debates was the antislavery movement. Gaining ground in the 1830s, the antislavery movement motivated people to respond to the issue of slavery in the way that suited their conscience.

The Ohio River Valley is located on what once was the border line between North and South, and what to slaves meant the difference between freedom and a life of enslavement. Clermont County, located along the Ohio River, was no different than other communities along the border, such as Brown County. Its citizens reacted in various ways. Those who were antislavery founded antislavery societies, published newspapers, and went on the lecture circuit. Those who were abolitionists went further and assisted fugitive slaves in their escape to freedom.

“The Antislavery Movement in Clermont County” looks at Clermont County’s history from its founding in 1800 to the height of the antislavery movement. The study shows that, although there are gaps in Clermont’s antislavery and Underground Railroad history, there was persistent and aggressive abolitionist activity in the county.
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Chapter One
An Introduction to Clermont County

Founded in 1800, Clermont County was one of the last counties formed by the Northwest territorial government. The first settlers came from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Virginia. William Lytle, known as the father of Clermont County and founder of the county’s first town, Williamsburg, surveyed the area and was able to own much of the comprising county through purchasing and transferring deeds. Antislavery sentiments appeared early on in Clermont’s history. Obed Denham, founder of the town, Bethel, was antislavery, as were Philip Gatch of Miami Township and James Sargant of Washington Township. Both Gatch and Sargant served as delegates at the constitutional convention for the state of Ohio.¹

The territorial legislation originally proposed the formation of Clermont County in 1799, but was vetoed by Arthur St. Clair, the then governor of the Northwest Territory. St. Clair who was at odds with the legislature, which was not uncommon for him, was the first governor of the Northwest Territory and played a significant role in the development of the early United States frontier. However, while building the territorial government, he appointed officials loyal to him and the central government and tried to delay statehood. Like many eastern leaders, St. Clair doubted frontier settlers could govern themselves and never understood their deep desire for self government.² He quarreled with judges, legislators and others over both serious and minor issues. So in 1799 when the territorial


legislation proposed the formation of a new county, St. Clair vetoed it on the belief that the power to create new counties lay with the Governor, not the territorial legislation.  

With this view of his power in mind, on 6 December 1800 St. Clair announced the creation of a new county, Clermont. Founded in 1801, Williamsburg was the first town in Clermont County. Its early settlers built log homes and farmed. The founder of Williamsburg and “father” of Clermont County, William Lytle, built his home in Williamsburg, along with other members of his family. Lytle built the town on an elevated tract of land laying in a bend of the East Fork of the Little Miami whose tributary streams such as Clover Creek formed the boundary of Williamsburg Township. Williamsburg is located in the eastern part of the county and close to the county line. The streams were essential to settlers who ran mills to grind wheat. Being the first town in Clermont, Williamsburg was also the first county seat and experienced growth because of this.

In 1792 the Williamsburg area witnessed the largest battle involving Native Americans and white settlers ever to be fought in the area. Five miles northeast of Williamsburg, in an area known as Grassy Run, Tecumseh and one hundred other Native Americans set up an encampment from which they harassed white settlers in Kentucky and attacked boats descending the Ohio River. After stealing forty horses and harassing settlers in Maysville, Kentucky, Tecumseh and his men returned to their camp, across the river, outside of Williamsburg. A group consisting of about thirty to forty white men

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.
under the leadership of Simon Kenton pursued the Shawnee and met them at Grassy Run. The two groups fought, each side taking some losses. The Kentuckians went back to Kentucky and the Shawnee left the area.6

By 1809 Williamsburg had four taverns, a post office, two stores, forty to fifty dwellings, a stone courthouse, and a log prison. However, when the county seat moved in 1823 to New Richmond, Williamsburg experienced a decline in population and wealth. From 1823 to 1858 the town’s population dwindled to only a few hundred and land value decreased to where townspeople sold their land for as low as thirty cents an acre.7 On 13 July 1863, Confederate General John Morgan led 2,000 men into Williamsburg. They stayed one night on the outskirts of town and his men pillaged stores, exchanged their horses for fresh ones and left the next day.8

By 1801, at the founding of Clermont County, the Ohio territory was on the verge of becoming a state, and delegates were elected to the Constitutional Convention. Philip Gatch and James Sargant represented Clermont County. Both were clergymen and former slave owners who were elected because of their uncompromising opposition to slavery.9 Gatch and Sargant were two of thirty-five delegates elected to attend the conference in Chillicothe. Gatch served on the committee for the preamble as well as the committee to draft the constitution’s first three articles Sargant’s participation was not recorded.

During this time the two main parties were the Federalist and the Democratic-Republican. At the convention the delegates from the two parties debated whether Ohio

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6 Rockey and Bancroft, History of Clermont County, 62.
7 Ibid., 63.
8 Ibid., 64.
9 Ibid., 122.
should legalize slavery. The Federalists opposed any further extension of the institution, while the Democratic-Republicans supported slavery and its extension into Ohio.\textsuperscript{10}

However, they were not the only ones with a particular viewpoint; Clermont residents themselves voiced their opinion on the new state’s constitution. When a letter from President Thomas Jefferson supporting the legalization of slavery was presented by a state delegate, Clermonters sent a petition, which was tabled, against the idea. The result of the debates among the representatives, of course, was that Ohio did not legalize the institution of slavery.

Throughout the early nineteenth century Clermont county grew like other developing areas. Its population was dependent upon migrants as they moved west across America. Towns and villages grew, and the county formed a stable government. Clermont residents founded churches, and although still a rural area, Clermont County did all that it could to try to rival its neighbor, Hamilton County.

The majority of the larger towns and villages of the county appeared after Ohio became a state. Williamsburg formed in 1795; Bethel, in 1798; Lindale, 1812; New Richmond, 1814; Batavia, 1815; Felicity, 1817; Moscow, 1816, and Palestine, 1818.

In 1798 Obed Denham, a Virginian who migrated to Kentucky and then to Ohio due to his growing dislike of slavery founded the small town of Bethel. Sources are unclear if he owned slaves. Since, Denham “made deliberate arrangements for his dependents and crossed the Ohio,” he may have freed his slaves before leaving Virginia.\textsuperscript{11} Denham brought his wife and children, his brother and his family and

\textsuperscript{10} Knepp, \textit{Freedom’s Struggle}, 12.

\textsuperscript{11} Byron Williams, \textit{History of Clermont and Brown Counties, Ohio}, Volume One (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1987), 213.
Jeremiah Beck and his family to Ohio with him. One may conclude that the “dependents” mentioned were most likely slaves. Denham had one goal and that was to build a congenial society for people who shared his opinion.\textsuperscript{12}

Denham purchased fifteen hundred acres of the Breckenridge Survey in Tate Township and within a year platted a town that he called Plainsfield. The other settlers called it Denhamstown in his honor, but the name later changed to its permanent name, Bethel. Bethel is the second oldest town in Clermont County. From its founding to 1830 Bethel residents established several churches, a post office, jail, and courthouse, before Williamsburg became the county seat. By 1840 the population in Bethel was 366.

In 1814 Jacob Light founded New Richmond. In 1816 Thomas Ashburn founded the town of Susanna adjacent to New Richmond, and the two towns merged in 1828 by a legislative act. Located on the Ohio River, New Richmond was a vibrant town during the 1800s. From 1823 to 1824 the village was the county seat until it moved to Batavia. New Richmond was economically successful due to the steamboat industry, and with its ideal location on the river, the village became a terminus for the county. In 1826 the first steamboat built in New Richmond was, the \textit{William Tell}; others would follow. By 1828 a steamboat, carrying goods and supplies, sailed from New Richmond to Maysville, Kentucky. By the 1830s New Richmond was an economically successful terminus for ship building and shipping in Clermont County.\textsuperscript{13}

Another successful community was the village of Batavia. Founded in 1814, Batavia steadily grew for a decade, and by 1824 was a prosperous community. Once it became the permanent county seat in Clermont county, store merchants built and the

\textsuperscript{12} Rockey and Bancroft, \textit{History of Clermont County}, 324.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 413.
population increased. The village experienced a growth in businesses such as groceries, taverns and hardware stores. As stated previously, Williamsburg lost residents after the county seat moved and, as the census records show, many of them moved closer to Batavia.

The town of Felicity today is very different from its founding in the early 1800s. In the early part of the 1800s Felicity was an important town in the county due to its location. Built close to the Ohio River, but on a hill, Felicity did not get flooded like other towns such as Moscow. After its founding in 1817, Felicity’s population grew as a result of Washington Township operating a free turnpike. During the height of antislavery societies, Felicity played a big role. The town was home to Daniel Fee, cousin of famous abolitionist John G. Fee.

The town of Moscow grew slowly. One early settler, John Payne built two buildings, one to serve as a store, and, the other, a hotel. Payne and the other founders of Moscow gambled with their decision to found and build up the town by bringing prospective buyers by boat from Cincinnati to look at lots. They needed investors to buy lots to ensure the town’s growth. The gamble was successful. Many of the prospective buyers did buy lots; however, even with the promise of a successful manufacturing future, the growth of the village was slow and many lots were forfeited for taxes. Going into the 1830s Moscow, though a small village, was the largest in the township. With a small population of farmers and one ferry operated by the Fee family, Moscow did not experience a real growth until the 1850s.14

The next two hamlets founded in the area, Lindale and Palestine, were small and by the twentieth century, annexed by other towns. In 1812, Andrew Coombs, Sr. and

Samuel Tibbet, Sr. founded Lindale when they bought adjoining farms and moved their families to Clermont. The two families were leaders in their township and were heavily involved in the antislavery society. Coombs Sr. and Tibbets Sr., along with their sons and wives, were founders of the Mt. Gilead Anti Slavery Society and leaders in their church. Coombs Sr. donated land for the Second Baptist Church on Ten Mile Road. The Tibbets later left Clermont, but the Coombs stayed.

Platted by Christian Ebersole and Zachariah Chapman in 1818, Palestine was an intended rival to New Richmond. Although there were several farms in the town’s vicinity, the original village site was never fully occupied, most likely due to its close position to the river and constant flooding. Some lots sold at extravagant prices, but they brought benefit only to the real estate owners by enhancing their property holdings.

Like the rest of Ohioans, Clermont residents paid attention to the growing national discussion about the institution of slavery. Of the two major parties of the United States, by the late 1830s, the Whig and the Democrat, Clermont County majority was Democratic until the 1854 presidential election. By 1840 the county’s Democratic Party split into proslavery and antislavery factions. This split became evident in the 1837 election when the antislavery Democrats bucked party hierarchy to help John Jolliffe, an antislavery Democrat, get elected as prosecuting attorney.

Clermont’s residents struggled over the issue of slavery. Some communities were more proslavery than others, and there were some who did all they could to support the

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16 Ibid., 74-75.
abolitionist cause. Clermont’s abolitionist history and role in the famous “underground railroad” though, has been exaggerated by local historians, and is lacking in detail. Yet it was a persistent and aggressive history. This study aims to distinguish myths from truths and document the antislavery activity in the county and identify those individuals who and organizations that participated in the antislavery movement, the people involved, and the connections the group had outside of Clermont.

Like other parts of the country the residents of Clermont did not agree on the existence or expansion of slavery, and debated the slavery issue. Beginning in 1836 antislavery societies emerged throughout the county, reaching a total of ten by the end of 1838. These societies published declarations in newspapers, held monthly meetings, raised funds for the American Antislavery Society, and participated in state conventions. Prominent members of the community from Clermont and surrounding counties traveled throughout Clermont lecturing about abolition and the slavery issue. The first western antislavery newspaper was published in New Richmond and in response, local newspapers like the Clermont Sun, reacted with opposition. The society’s goals were not only local but also national. They worked on the national level by gathering petitions to abolish slavery in Washington, D.C.

Some Clermont residents were rumored to have been agents on the Underground Railroad. Legend holds that stations were in Moscow, Felicity, Bethel, Williamsburg, Palestine and New Richmond. Several names like Fee, Huber and Ebersole, repeatedly appear in stories. John Joliffe, one-time district attorney and lawyer in Clermont, moved to Cincinnati, and in seventeen cases Joliffe argued that the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law
was unconstitutional. In 1854 he defended runaway slave Margaret Garner. Jolliffe was an officer in the Batavia and Clermont antislavery societies and traveled throughout the local counties and crossed into Indiana to attend meetings and to speak on the issue of abolition.

Clermont County’s abolitionist movement was much like others in the United States. The county’s residents were divided, and the movement faced both acceptance and opposition. Rumors surrounded the activities of some people due to their alleged involvement in the Underground Railroad.

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19 Margaret Garner was a fugitive slave who, when surrounded by officers to return her and her family to slavery, killed one of her children and tried to kill another child.
Picture of Obed Denham’s grave in Bethel, Ohio, Taken by Bethany Pollitt in April 2009.
Chapter Two

The Beginning: Antislavery Activity in Clermont County, 1800-1831

During the 1830s abolitionism barged onto the American stage in books, the antislavery press, lecture series, and more. However, antislavery sentiment had existed in the United States dating back to the pre-revolutionary period. What caused this increase in antislavery activity was a combination of events that happened in the churches and events that occurred in the South that caught the attention of northerners. Clermont County residents were not immune to the events happening around them. As in the rest of the United States antislavery sentiment did exist in Clermont County since its founding and continued to grow in the years prior to 1861.

During the 1820s the United States witnessed several pivotal events that launched the issue of slavery and its opponents onto the national stage. A perfect example was William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison, who became one of the nation’s leaders in the abolitionist movement, began his newspaper, the Liberator, in January 1830. Until 1828 he was unknown to many in the North and the South; however those southerners who had heard of him did not admire his work. In 1831 in Southampton County, Virginia, slave preacher Nat Turner led a slave revolt that killed around sixty whites. Southerners, outraged, paranoid, and wanting explanations, blamed black preachers and the northern abolitionists, especially William Lloyd Garrison and David Walker. The Nat Turner

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24 David Walker was a free black originally from the South. In 1829 he published his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular and Very Expressly to those of the United States of America*. He called for enslaved blacks to revolt against their masters. Copies of his Appeal were distributed throughout the South in secret. Once read, southerners banned the pamphlet and arrested anyone who had a copy. Walker was found dead in 1830 under mysterious circumstances. [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2931.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4h2931.html) (accessed September 2, 2010).
rebellion sparked, what author Stephen B. Oates called, the Great Southern Reaction of the 1830s and 1840s. To southerners, the South became menaced by internal slave disaffection and outside abolitionist agitation. It became a closed, martial society, determined to preserve and perpetuate its slave based society by confiscating abolitionist literature and forming vigilance committees to destroy any information that would encourage any type of “disloyalty” among their “happy and contented slave.” The Nat Turner Rebellion, combined with the lack of success of the American Colonization Society to return large numbers of African Americans to Africa, and the power of the press helped the small, unorganized, fledgling antislavery movement to organize, gain membership and become a powerful force.

The press became a very popular tool for abolitionists. Besides Garrison’s *Liberator* there were other antislavery and abolitionist newspapers such as *Freedom’s Journal, North Star, Mirror of Liberty, National Anti-Slavery Standard* and more. Circulation of the press was an essential and important tool for the abolitionists in spreading the antislavery message and gaining new membership. Antislavery newspapers engaged readers and engaged the public in a series of persuasive actions that included sending petitions to their local, state and national government, writing books, and participating in public debates. Clermont’s residents were no different. A few residents gained national prominence while others gained local fame for their actions. James Birney’s newspaper, *The Philanthropist*, was the first western antislavery newspaper and published first in the village of New Richmond in Clermont County. And it was the presence of an antislavery press in the area that encouraged and emboldened abolitionist activity in Clermont County.

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The establishment and publication of *The Philanthropist* was important and pertinent to Clermont County for two reasons. The first reason was that the office of *The Philanthropist* was located in New Richmond instead of Cincinnati due to safety concerns by James G. Birney, owner of the newspaper. Secondly, Clermont County antislavery chapters began forming shortly after the establishment and publication of the first issues of *The Philanthropist*, raising the question of whether Birney influenced their founding.

Although James G. Birney did not found *The Philanthropist* until 1 January 1836, his idea for the paper came years earlier. James Gillespie Birney was born, 1792 in Danville, Kentucky to a slaveholding family. He received his education from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) where he emerged wanting to become a lawyer. He immediately entered Kentucky politics, and by 1818 Birney had moved his young wife and family to Huntsville, Alabama to further his wealth and influence.²⁶ It was while he lived in Alabama that Birney began to question the institution of slavery. He joined the American Colonization Society in 1826 and traveled the South trying to raise funds for the organization.²⁷ During this time Birney saw the American Colonization Society’s plan as “a germ of effort capable of expansion adequate to our largest necessities in the extermination of slavery.”²⁸

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²⁷ The American Colonization Society was founded in 1816 with the goal of helping freed slaves or free persons of color return to Africa if they chose. A colony was set up in Liberia by the United States, and although the organization lasted a long time it was of course not successful in getting large numbers of African Americans to return to Africa. Many Africans Americans saw themselves as just that, African Americans not just Africans and did not want to leave the land that they called home. It was also an impossible goal.

Birney’s interest in the American Colonization Society and his conversion to the antislavery movement did not happen overnight. This view stemmed from his early childhood. Birney came into contact with an antislavery Baptist group in Kentucky known as the Baptist Licking-Locust Association, Friends of Humanity. The Reverend David Barrow, who led this group, was thought to be radical by the area’s North District Association who expelled him. Along with members from other churches in the northern and western Kentucky area, Barrow formed the Baptist Licking-Locust Association as an anti-slavery church. The Baptist Licking-Locust Association, Friends of Humanity was organized by church members in 1807 and was made up of twelve churches, eleven in Northern Kentucky and one in Clermont County. An offshoot of this organization was the Kentucky Abolition Society, and members, including Barrow, became members of it. Because of the creation of the Kentucky Abolition Society and the American Colonization Society, the Baptist Licking-Locust Association, Friends of Humanity did not last long and would eventually die out.29

Birney’s family heard Rev. Barrow speak. Although Birney’s aunt believed in Barrow’s preaching, his father did not. The encounter with Barrow was Birney’s first interaction with antislavery activity. Over the years Barrow’s preaching came to convert James Birney to abolitionism.

Birney’s dream, prior to leaving the American Colonization Society and joining the American Antislavery Society, was to see slave states, especially Virginia, Maryland, Tennessee and Kentucky, free themselves from slavery. But he believed that if they did so suddenly and without colonization, then there would be a rush to sell the slaves to the

lower South, and that would further increase the number of blacks over whites in the South, causing more tension and further support for slavery. Birney did not support abolition at this time. He wrote to newspapers attacking abolitionists who criticized the American Colonization Society. In these writings Birney came very close to defending the southern position on slavery by stating that abolitionists did not understand the southern fears of immediate emancipation, that abolitionists were too far away from the situation to know anything about the true relationship between master and slave, and that by their own agitation abolitionists were riveting the chains of slavery more securely.

By 1833 Birney had become an abolitionist and decided to strike a more effective blow against slavery, and he moved back to his hometown of Danville, Kentucky. He reasoned that by moving back to a border state he could do something that would lead to a solution to the slavery problem. Prior to moving back to Danville, Birney sold his plantation slaves, but kept a few slaves for his household staff due to special circumstances. By November 1833 Birney had settled back in his hometown. At that time Kentuckians believed that out of all the slave states, they were rather liberal in regard to slavery in the sense that the state’s economic system was not nearly so dependent on slavery, as was the case in states such as Alabama, Mississippi or Virginia. It was also by this time that Birney’s doubts about colonization were growing. He wrote to Randolph Gurley stating he was moving toward the position that colonization was

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30 Fladeland, James G. Birney: From Slaveholder to Abolitionist, 67.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 72. The circumstances for Birney purchasing slaves were acts of pity to keep a family together. He bought a man named Michael so that his owner would not sell him farther south and separate him from his family. Birney later purchased Michael’s wife and their three children and a mulatto girl. He emancipated all of his slaves in 1835, paid Michael back wages with interest and apprenticed the girl in his household until she became an adult.
inadequate and was an impediment to emancipation. Birney did not express this view publicly, however, and he was elected Vice-President of the Kentucky Colonization Society. It was in this role as Vice-President in 1834 that Birney was invited to visit Lane Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio.\(^\text{33}\)

During this time students at Lane Seminary began public debates over the issue of slavery. The administration, unhappy with the possibility of bad publicity, wanted the debates stopped and the trustees were considering disciplinary action against the students. Birney visited the school while the trustees’ decision was still pending and spoke with the students, including Theodore Weld. Weld spent an immense amount of time with Birney discussing the issue of slavery trying to convince him of his true calling as an abolitionist. By the end of his visit, Birney confided to Weld that he was ready to abandon colonization and had to declare himself an abolitionist. Like others who had or would become disillusioned with the American Colonization Society, Birney argued that the society failed in practice because of its inadequacy and its lack of success in returning former slaves to Africa.\(^\text{34}\) Birney expressed his frustration with the American Colonization Society and with the institution of slavery in a letter to Lewis Tappan in 1835. Birney wrote to Tappan telling him of his firm belief that immediate emancipation was the only answer. He believed that slavery was detrimental to morality. That slavery impoverished the country, “effeminating our men,” and it would eventually bring the judgment of God upon the country. He went further stressing that northerners were

\(^{33}\) Lane Seminary was a theological school affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. Lyman Beecher served as a board member for years. The school, founded in 1830 in Cincinnati became famous for the rift the board of directors had with some students. A group of students including Theodore Weld wanted to have a debate over slavery, and the board members disagreed. Some students left Lane and transferred to what became Oberlin College.

\(^{34}\) Fladeland, *James G. Birney: From Slaveholder to Abolitionist*, 84.
ignorant of the slaveholder’s tenacity and of the moral obliquities that slavery had produced in mankind.  

By May 1834 Birney resigned from the colonization society and the Kentucky Society for the Gradual Relief of the State from Slavery. On 2 June 1834 he assembled his family and the slaves he still held and left to announce that he was manumitting the last of his slaves and that he was in fact establishing an antislavery newspaper in Danville. He also helped create the Kentucky Anti Slavery Society.

Danville’s residents did not warmly receive the idea of an abolitionist paper being published there. One resident, F. T. Taylor, published a letter from himself and a group of residents stating to Birney that [we] “advise you of the peril that must and inevitably will attend the execution of your paper.”  

They further insisted that by publishing his paper Birney would poison the minds of the “now happy and contented slaves.” They wrote “you injure society at large. You injure the slaves themselves. You do good to none.” They concluded by reminding Birney that the problems and violence that would arise from his paper could not possibly gratify the man in seeing this neighborhood, “which gave you birth and has reared you to manhood, convulsed with civil strife.” The group of gentlemen took the issue to the state legislature in hopes that it would pass a law restricting what Birney could publish. In his response Birney attacked them for trying to violate his First Amendment right. He concluded that “Slavery is a sin before God and

37 Ibid., 199.
38 Ibid., 200.
will end, if not abandoned, in ruin of our country.” Birney finally decided to move to a free state. Courtesy of Theodore Weld, Birney had already met abolitionists in Cincinnati such as John Rankin and Augustus Wattles and found them not fanatics but mostly sincere, serious minded Christians. Weld had already suggested Cincinnati as a promising place for the paper since the city was close to Kentucky. By 1835 Birney was once again on the move. This time he sold his farm and bought a home in Cincinnati.

Upon Birney’s arrival in Cincinnati Samuel W. Davies, the mayor of Cincinnati, along with Charles Hammond, editor of the Cincinnati Gazette, warned him that the publication of his newspaper might provoke violence. Birney did not want to breach the peace and decided that it would be better if he established the newspaper’s printing office in another town. On 25 November 1835 he wrote to Gerrit Smith, “I shall commence the paper in a small village about twenty miles up the river from this place, or if not here at or about fifty miles above.” The two possible locations were New Richmond or Ripley. New Richmond was the small village located about twenty miles from Cincinnati and Ripley was about fifty miles away. The logical explanation for choosing New Richmond was that the village was closer to Cincinnati than Ripley. It was easier for Birney to travel to New Richmond for the newspaper business rather than the fifty miles to Ripley.

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40 Ibid., 109.

41 Ibid., 254.

The first issue of *The Philanthropist* appeared on 1 January 1836. In the first issue Birney wrote that he had chosen New Richmond not only because it was, “a pleasant place to dwell in but that his publication office would be safe.”

The newspaper ridiculed the slave states and promoted abolitionist meetings throughout the area. It was a major propaganda tool for the newly organized New Richmond Antislavery Society. This organization was the first antislavery group in Clermont County, and it used *The Philanthropist* to advertise its meetings and resolutions. Other antislavery groups that formed after New Richmond followed suit. The newspaper served as a soap box for the groups. On 29 January 1836 the New Richmond Antislavery Society advertised its monthly meeting at the Presbyterian Church.

Antislavery groups also used the paper to publish their resolutions after their meetings and who their officers were. On Friday 9 December 1836, *The Philanthropist* advertised that it was going to create a county antislavery society. The town organizations met and the members appointed committees to create a constitution and the group announced it was petitioning Congress to abolish slavery within the Washington, D.C. area. Officers of the Clermont County antislavery society were: John Rogers, President; Ezekiel Dimmit, First Vice President; John Shannon, Second Vice President; Andrew Coombs, Third Vice President; George Beecher, Corresponding Secretary; and John Jolliffe, Recording Secretary. Other advertisements listed upcoming meetings. For example on Friday 1 April 1836, the New Richmond Antislavery Society announced its upcoming monthly meeting in the Presbyterian meetinghouse on Saturday evening 2 April 1836.

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43 Announcement, *The Philanthropist* 1 January 1836.
44 *The Philanthropist*, 29 January 1836.
There were no other antislavery newspapers in the area and other local papers criticized *The Philanthropist* and the abolitionists. The fact that the antislavery groups emerged at the same time that *The Philanthropist* moved to Clermont County could be a coincidence; it is more likely, though, that the newspaper was an catalyst to community organizing. Abolitionists finally had an outlet to voice their sentiments and to promote their organization.

By 1836 there were more than 600 residents in New Richmond and the local papers published some residents’ opinions of the arrival of *The Philanthropist*. One resident and abolitionist who expressed his concerns about the arrival of Birney and his paper was the Reverend Daniel Parker. In a letter published in *The Philanthropist*, Parker wrote he believed the paper would be a “terrible paper from what I had heard.” Apparently his wife convinced him to subscribe to the paper, and by the end of 1837 he was an agent for the paper in New Richmond.45

*The Philanthropist* did not stay long in New Richmond. By the end of 1836 Birney moved the paper’s headquarters back to Cincinnati. Several factors influenced his decision to close the New Richmond office and move it back to Cincinnati. Mail arrival was irregular and delivery was uncertain during this time. Making several trips a week from his home in Cincinnati to the office in New Richmond exhausted him, especially with the failing health of his wife who had consumption.46 Birney’s own health weakened because of the constant pressure of writing for the paper as well as lecturing in

45 *The Philanthropist*, 12 December 1837.

neighboring towns. An example of this pressure appeared in the 12 February 1836 issue of the paper. In the To Subscribers section Birney explained why he had not published the paper the previous week. Birney had not published the paper because he, himself, had to take the press for repairs to Cincinnati due to “the stopping of the steamboats by the ice, and the bad state of the roads” and it prevented Birney from having the press returned in time to print the sixth number.

In 1836 these factors made Birney decide to move the office back to Cincinnati, in spite of Cincinnati residents stating at a meeting that they would “exert every lawful effort to suppress the publication of any abolition paper in this city or neighborhood.” These Cincinnati residents also meant trying to stop the paper’s publication in New Richmond. Birney saw this as an opportunity to demonstrate that not all people in Ohio felt the same way and furthermore that the number of supporters in Cincinnati for his paper and abolitionism was stronger than the group whose commercial interests lay in catering to the South. This move did not deter Clermont’s antislavery societies who continued to use The Philanthropist for advertising for businesses owned by their members, meetings and resolutions.

The Philanthropist was an instrument for Clermont County abolitionists. Its office being located and printed in New Richmond did coincide with the formations of antislavery societies. The Philanthropist contributed to the growing antislavery activity in Clermont County. While the residents of Clermont County were already trying to

48 The Philanthropist, 12 February 1836.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
organize antislavery groups prior to its first printing, the newspaper encouraged antislavery activity with the paper being an excellent recruitment and propaganda tool. From the time residents settled in Clermont County through the 1830s and 40s and 50s until the end of the Civil War, Clermont County had a strong and active antislavery presence.

Photograph of what is believed to be the spot where The Philanthropist office was in downtown New Richmond. Taken by Bethany Pollitt, April 2009.
# 1820 Clermont County Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>White Population</th>
<th>Black Population</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Williamsburg</td>
<td>1,197</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tate</td>
<td>1,812</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>1,901</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1,978</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>2,859</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2,861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td>1,235</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>1,187</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,188</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>1,638</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goshen</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonelick</td>
<td>1,086</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,131</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,147</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### 1830 Clermont County Census Record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City or Township</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>[Free] Black Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Batavia Township</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethel</td>
<td>340</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chilo</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicity</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Township</td>
<td>1705</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goshen</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goshen Township</td>
<td>894</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami Township</td>
<td>1554</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milford</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe Township</td>
<td>1448</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neville</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Richmond</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newberry</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Township</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palestine</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pt. Pleasant</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonelick Township</td>
<td>1344</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tate Township</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Township</td>
<td>1382</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Township</td>
<td>1695</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>740</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williamsburg</td>
<td>286</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williamsburg Township</td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodville</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,466</strong></td>
<td><strong>92</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1840 Clermont County Census Record\textsuperscript{54}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>White Population</th>
<th>[Free] Black Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td>2157</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>2204</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goshen</td>
<td>1441</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>882</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>2059</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe</td>
<td>1621</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>2848</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonelick</td>
<td>1477</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tate</td>
<td>2497</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>1420</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>2083</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>945</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamsburg</td>
<td>1449</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>23,083</strong></td>
<td><strong>122</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{54} U.S. Bureau of the Census. \textit{Compendium of the Enumeration of the inhabitants and statistics of the United States, as obtained at the Department of State, From the Returns of the 6\textsuperscript{th} Census by Counties and Principal Towns, Exhibiting the Population, Wealth, and Resources of the Country; with Tables of Apportionment, Showing first: The number of Representatives, as Fixed by the Constitution Before the First Enumeration, and the Number Prescribed According to the First, 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 4\textsuperscript{th}, 5\textsuperscript{th} Census; Also the Number of Representatives Each State will be Entitled to According to the 6\textsuperscript{th} Census, with the Fractions Over, Commencing at the Ratio of 55 thousand, and Ascending by 500 to 70,00 (Washington, D.C.: Thomas Allen, 1841), 76-77.
# 1850 Clermont County Census Record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Township</th>
<th>White Population</th>
<th>Free Colored Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td>2,764</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin</td>
<td>3,039</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goshen</td>
<td>1,922</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>1,241</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>2,667</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe</td>
<td>1,876</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>4,223</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonelick</td>
<td>1,840</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tate</td>
<td>2,887</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>1,799</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>2,533</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>1,394</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamsburg</td>
<td>1,858</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30,043</strong></td>
<td><strong>412</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### 1860 Clermont County Census Record

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City/Township</th>
<th>White Population</th>
<th>Free Black Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Batavia</td>
<td>2,915</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chilo</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicity</td>
<td>913</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Township</td>
<td>2,120</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goshen</td>
<td>1,828</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackson Township</td>
<td>1,575</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laurel</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>2,995</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe</td>
<td>1,692</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moscow</td>
<td>433</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt. Carmel</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neville</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Boston</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Richmond</td>
<td>1,778</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio Township</td>
<td>959</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierce Township</td>
<td>1,783</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pt. Pleasant</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Township</td>
<td>139</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stonelick Township</td>
<td>1,681</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tate Township</td>
<td>2,728</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union Township</td>
<td>1,512</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington Township</td>
<td>1,878</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Williamsburg</td>
<td>2,028</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withamsville</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne Township</td>
<td>1,614</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>32,201</strong></td>
<td><strong>833</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Chapter Three

Abolitionism in Clermont County and the Underground Railroad

The American Antislavery Society’s goal was the immediate end to the institution of slavery in the United States. However, this goal never would have been achieved without the actions of its members. They strove to achieve this goal through their local chapters by engaging in a series of persuasive activities that included sending petitions to their local, state and national government, as well as producing antislavery newspapers, books, and lecture series. Opposition to the slavery in the United States existed since the institution’s inception. The beginning of the antislavery movement began largely with the Quakers. The Quakers believed that slavery had a negative effect on white Americans’ morality, ethics, work habits, civil liberties and opportunity. They also believed that slavery violated Christian principles, the marriage contract, and female purity, along with denying black men their position as master of their homes. By the 1830s the movement had moved beyond the Quaker community and became better organized on both the local and national level. This group believed, as the Quakers did, in slavery’s offenses to America’s morality. However, they were different from their Quaker antislavery predecessors. Instead of gradual destruction of slavery they demanded an immediate end to slavery. They were uncompromising, tenacious, fervent and provocative. This group formed the American Antislavery Society. Some antislavery chapters were biracial, and some were active in what was the Underground Railroad.57

When Clermont residents began organizing antislavery societies in 1836, New Richmond formed the first antislavery organization. The antislavery residents advertised in *The Philanthropist* stating the “New Richmond antislavery society will hold its monthly meeting in the Presbyterian Church on the First Saturday in February, at early-candle lighting.” According to *The Philanthropist*, James G. Birney was going to be the speaker. The paper later reported that the meeting was thinly attended due to inclement weather and only added eleven new members at the February meeting. All subsequent announcements for meetings of the New Richmond antislavery chapter indicated they took place at the Presbyterian Church in the village.

In all, eleven antislavery societies formed in Clermont County between 1836 and 1837. They were New Richmond, Neville, Batavia, Milton, Felicity, Bethel, Goshen, Grassy Run, Monroe Township, Mt. Gilead and the Clermont County Antislavery Society formed in 1836. Only the minutes of Mt. Gilead Antislavery Society’s Lindale Chapter meetings survived. Even those were limited to meetings from 1836 to July 1838. Information on the other societies’ meeting dates and resolutions, however, appeared in local newspapers such as *The Philanthropist*.

The Mt. Gilead Society held its first meeting in August 1836 at the Baptist Meeting House. The constitution was adopted and twenty-nine members joined. Abolitionist Reverend John Rankin from Ripley addressed the group at their first meeting. There are no notes on what he said. There were a total of seventy-one members, both men and women, on the roster by 1838. Twelve members were from two prominent families in the small hamlet, the Tibbets and Coombs. Andrew Coombs, Jr., and his wife, Kitty Ann Coombs were members along with Susanna, Martha and Elisabeth.

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58 *The Philanthropist*, 29 January 1836.
Coombs.\textsuperscript{59} A person identified as Martin Pease was also listed. He possibly was a relative of Dr. L.T. Pease of Williamsburg who became a “conductor” on the Underground Railroad.

The constitution of the Mt. Gilead Antislavery Society stated its object was the entire abolition of slavery in the United States. According to the 23 December 1836 meeting minutes, the group believed that slavery was inconsistent with the principles of the U.S. government and the Christian religion. The minutes also stated that the group resolved that it was the duty of all people, especially Christians, to exert their influence for the speedy abolition of slavery in the U.S. They also resolved that the formation of the antislavery society and discussion about slavery were the most effective means for the abolition of the institution.\textsuperscript{60} Finally a resolution passed stating that the organization “will never encourage the coloured people to assert their rights by force.”\textsuperscript{61}

Between March 1837 and July 1838 the group raised funds for subscriptions to several newspapers, including \textit{The Liberator}, \textit{Zion’s Watchmen}, \textit{The Emancipator}, and \textit{The Philanthropist}. At one meeting the group contributed funds to gain books for a library. They also agreed to pen a subscription for quarterly payments to the American Antislavery Committee. On 17 May 1838 the group voted to send Andrew Coombs, Jr., as a delegate to the state antislavery convention. Samuel Tibbets and Andrew Coombs, Sr., and Jr. were all officers of the Mt. Gilead Antislavery Society. Many people from the

\textsuperscript{59} Minutes of the Mt. Gilead Antislavery Society, Gilead Anti-Slavery Society of Clermont County Minutes, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
smaller antislavery societies joined the county-wide Clermont County Antislavery Society when it formed in 1836. The individual chapters, however, continued to meet.

The chapters regularly held meetings and conducted lectures to inform and, hopefully, to persuade people to join the antislavery societies. It was during these lectures and through newspapers that most cases of opposition emerged.

John Rankin was a frequent lecturer at antislavery chapter meetings in Clermont. He spoke throughout Clermont County on behalf of the American Antislavery Society. However, his lectures were not always peaceful gatherings. In Withamsville, proslavery members of the audience verbally abused and struck him with a firebrand, but Rankin was not injured. He was also pelted with eggs while lecturing in Williamsburg.62

In 1847 the Clermont Academy experienced its own opposition when the Parkers admitted three of Milton Taylor’s mulatto children to the school. They were from Maysville, Kentucky. John Adams, a white student also from Kentucky, was upset about their enrollment and threatened to kill them. Eventually Adams left the academy along with some other white Kentucky students and a few students from Ohio as well.63

Between 1837 and 1838 the country witnessed the debate to annex the new Republic, Texas and political whirlwind surrounding debates about whether new states should be admitted to the Union as slave or Free states. The right to petition and the freedom of speech also were hot topics during the debates raging in the Senate over Texas, slavery and abolitionists petitioning Congress. In March 1837 the Clermont


63 Knepp, Freedom’s Struggle, 134.
County Antislavery Society resolved that the group would continue to petition Congress for the abolition of slavery and the domestic slave trade in Washington, D.C. They also resolved to petition the Ohio legislature to repeal the oppressive laws on the freed people of color living in the state such as requiring freedmen to post a security bond to prove they were not a burden to the state, and that the state should allow their children into public schools.64

On 12 February 1836 *The Philanthropist* received a warning that “Inhabitants of a certain district, back of New Richmond, in conjunction with some Kentuckians” organized an attack on the paper’s New Richmond office. The writer went on to say the citizens of New Richmond should not have to suffer with the establishment of an abolition paper, and that no set of men “had the right to dictate to the people of the village what kind of paper they should have.”65 Obviously, the writer failed to recognize the irony in his statement.

In the 27 February 1838 issue, *The Philanthropist* published a letter from “A Friend to Man.” The author wrote that he attended a slavery debate at the Williamsburg Methodist Church. The debate was on whether the Bible justified slavery. Sadly, the author wrote that after each side spoke for over an hour, the judges, to the audience’s disapproval, concluded that the Bible did justify slavery.66

In 1837 the antislavery movement as a whole experienced a slowdown. This economic crisis that year caused local societies and individuals to renege on pledges, drying up the treasuries of national, state and local societies and curtailing the

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64 *The Philanthropist*, 10 March 1837.

65 *The Philanthropist*, 12 February 1836.

66 *The Philanthropist*, 27 February 1838.
commissioning of agents for the lecture field. The economic crisis could be why the Mt. Gilead Antislavery Society’s meeting minutes ended in 1838. During a crisis people tend to pay more attention to their own survival while charity and other causes lose priority, for that time. This economic crisis affected every member of Clermont’s antislavery societies. However, the lectures that the Clermont Antislavery Society sponsored did not stop and increased by 1840. The *Ripley Bee*, published in Ripley, located east on the Ohio River in Brown County, Ohio, had numerous advertisements in 1840 and 1841 for the Clermont Antislavery Society. On 18 November 1840 the *Ripley Bee* advertised that the Clermont County Antislavery Society would hold a convention. The paper reported that, “we hope the friends in Clermont and neighborhood will rally with all of their strength. There will be good speaking and we hope, decided action.”

A letter from the Reverend Daniel Parker to a Dr. Bailey was reprinted in the 20 January 1841 issue of the *Ripley Bee* discussing Parker’s recent circuit of lecturing. Unfortunately the experience proved to be unproductive. In Williamsburg he conducted a lecture under a tree and “a drunken fellow tried for several hours to provoke a fight by pulling his clothes and trying to interrupt him with nonsensical vociferations.” A woman told the Reverend Parker she wished he “were roasted” and that she had his fat “to grease her shoes.” However, this comment did not bother Parker who stated, “Words are but air and tongues but clay.” He ended the letter by writing that two


68 *Ripley Bee*, 18 November 1840.

69 *Ripley Bee*, 20 January 1841.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.
communities in Clermont County had refused his application to lecture at that point in time, but he did not name them in hopes that they would “repent and do better hereafter.” On 3 February 1841 Parker lectured at Withamsville to a large and attentive crowd and ended by saying that one of James Birney’s emancipated slaves, Edwin Mathews, was a student at his Clermont Academy.

As previously stated, Thomas Donaldson was instrumental in convincing James Birney to set up office in New Richmond for his newspaper. One of Clermont’s elite residents, Donaldson married Susanna Parker, the daughter of antislavery clergyman Daniel Parker, bringing together two strong abolitionist families. Donaldson was an immigrant from Wales. His mother, Anna Margarita, was a staunch abolitionist. His brothers, William and Christian, prominent businessmen in Clermont, were also antislavery and founding members of the Ohio Antislavery Society. Thomas Donaldson owned a mercantile store in New Richmond with his brothers. A staunch abolitionist, also Donaldson attended conventions and meetings to forward the cause. He was a personal friend to James Birney and a faithful supporter of The Philanthropist. Donaldson and his brothers assured Birney that they and other New Richmond residents would protect both Birney and his paper.

Frustrated with the mercantile business, Donaldson soon closed shop. He wanted only free labor goods sold in his store, but this was expensive and hard to do, so

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72 Ripley Bee, 20 January 1841.
74 Rockey and Bancroft, History of Clermont County, 424.
Donaldson opened a hardware store with his brothers in Cincinnati. Donaldson normally would have purchased his free labor goods from Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky. Two of his other brothers returned to the family farm in Wales, while Christian and Thomas moved from Cincinnati back to Clermont and stayed there until their deaths.\footnote{Rockey and Bancroft, \textit{History of Clermont County}, 424.}

In November 1850 residents of New Richmond also demonstrated their lack of tolerance for slave catchers working in their village. The events were reprinted in \textit{The Ripley Bee} from the \textit{New Richmond Age} in an article, “A Stampede,” recounting the event that unfolded. That month three men from Kentucky had arrived in New Richmond and attempted to arrest a man named Hubbard Cable who, according to the Kentuckians, was a fugitive slave. Residents of the village informed the Kentuckians that they did not oppose the recapturing if the men followed by the law. However, the Kentuckians tried to remove Cable forcibly and were stopped. Cable had lived and worked in Ripley for some time, so residents telegraphed a Mr. Ryan, a resident of Ripley and Cable’s employer, who verified that Cable was a free man and that he could produce his papers. The Kentuckians left after being arrested and then released by New Richmond officials. The \textit{Ripley Bee} concluded that, “we feel very confident that these men are thoroughly satisfied that New Richmond is the wrong place to attempt to arrest even a slave without paying strict attention to all the dry formalities of the law.”\footnote{\textit{Ripley Bee}, “A Stampede,” 30 November 1850.}

A purported antislavery Clermont resident of national note was Thomas Morris of Bethel. A lawyer for forty years, Morris achieved national recognition when elected first as an Ohio State Representative and then as U.S. Senator. Senator Morris was a complicated character. He was the first attorney in the county, admitted to the bar in
In 1806 he was elected as representative to the state legislature, a position that he held for twenty years. He served on the committee of county school funds for several years. In 1832 he was elected to the U.S. Senate, but his career in the Senate was not very long. Although it is debated by local historians whether Morris was really an abolitionist, slavery was the undoing of his career in that body. A Democrat, Morris challenged men such as Senator Henry Clay (Kentucky) and Vice-President John C. Calhoun (South Carolina). He presented to Congress petitions given to him by Ohio residents who asked for the abolition of slavery in Washington, D.C. In 1839 a pro-slavery democrat, Benjamin Tappen replaced Morris in Congress, but Morris did not disappear.

Some argued that Morris was not really antislavery but just playing for votes; others argued that he was truly antislavery. Morris’s biographers differ on his stand on abolition; however, Morris was a perfect example of what happened to a person addressing the issue of slavery. Morris also believed that anyone violating state slave laws should be punished. He believed “it to be the duty of the states as well as their interest to abolish slavery where it exists, but that no other state would be justifiable in interfering for that purpose.”78 However, by 1839 he wrote to Henry Clay that there needed to be an “amalgamation of the black power of the south with the white power of the north because separately they could not succeed.”79 Morris changed his approach over time on actions he thought appropriate to end slavery. Morris’s beliefs about equal rights for African Americans he stated, “I do not believe it would be good policy, or

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79 Ibid., 115.
promote the safety of the country, the happiness of ourselves, or the Negro race to admit them to the enjoyment of equal political or social privileges.”

His last speech in the U.S. Senate was in February 1839. Morris’s departing words reflected his view of slavery. He stated, “I hope on returning to my home and friends to rejoin them again in rekindling the beacon-fires of liberty on every hill in our state; until their broad glare shall enlighten every valley and the song of triumph will soon be heard. That all may be safe, I conclude that the Negro will yet be set free.”

Morris’s career did not end in the Senate. He returned home a hero to his companions in the Antislavery Society. During his life he not only served Ohio in the legislature but mentored future lawyers such as Thomas L. Hamer and John Jolliffe, who became famous abolitionists in the 1850s. In 1843 Morris was nominated as the Vice-Presidential candidate, but he died suddenly in 1844. Salmon P. Chase, a future U.S. Senator and future U.S. Chief Justice of the Supreme Court from Ohio, spoke of Morris as a sincere abolitionist. “Senator Morris first led me to see the character of the slave power as an aristocracy, and the need of an earnest organization to counteract its pretensions. He was far beyond the time he lived in.”

A member and officer of the Clermont County Antislavery Society and the Batavia Antislavery Society, John Jolliffe, Morris’s protégé, was a determined man. Besides being a prominent attorney, Jolliffe wanted to prove that the Fugitive Slave Law

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81 Ibid, 115.


attached to the 1850 Compromise was unconstitutional. Jolliffe also gained national attention when he served on the defense team for escaped fugitive Margaret Garner.

The argument leading up to Congress passing the Compromise of 1850 stemmed from the territories being acquired as a result of the war with Mexico. These territories included the future state California. The issue was whether to admit them as Free or slave states. Proslavery supporters argued that slavery was not to be discussed by outsiders; it was a “personal” problem. Antislavery supporters agreed with the Wilmot Proviso which was first brought to Congress’s attention in 1846. This proviso proposed by David Wilmot (Pennsylvania) banned slavery from any territory acquired from the Mexican-American War. The Wilmot Proviso never became law; however, it framed the national debate over slavery until the Civil War. The Wilmot Proviso substituted a sectional division between northern and southern states for the usual party differences in Washington.84

Attached to the Compromise of 1850 was the Fugitive Slave Act. The Fugitive Slave Act denied jury trials to fugitive slaves, and it provided a fine and imprisonment for any person who refused to assist in the arrest of a slave. For northerners the Fugitive Slave Act meant extending the power of the federal government and was seen as a threat to civil liberties. For southerners it was not the actual practice of recovering fugitive slaves that made the Fugitive Slave Act important, but that it was a test of the 1850 Compromise.

Initially angered by the Fugitive Slave Act, abolitionists soon realized the value the law had for them. Abolitionist propaganda concentrated on this issue and helped to

magnify in the public mind the number of slave escapes, as well as the pursuits and the drama of resistance to the law. Many northerners who were anti-abolitionist joined the abolitionists in opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act as the fugitive issue became the psychological rather than the practical focus of the sectional controversy. When the law was actually enforced, it often resulted in violence and some deaths. There were those who chose to fight the Fugitive Slave Act in the courts, and fighting the act in courts is what John Jolliffe, a one time resident and lawyer of Clermont, did.

John Jolliffe was not native to Clermont County. Born in 1804 to a Quaker family in Virginia, he moved to Batavia in Clermont after law school in 1827. The first two years in Clermont County were not the easiest for Jolliffe. He worried his parents with thoughts of moving to the Deep South, possibly to New Orleans, but within two years Jolliffe’s finances and life turned the corner. He married Synthelia McClure. The McClures were among the original families that settled Batavia and were active abolitionists. The Jolliffes had no children, but both became active members of Clermont’s Antislavery Society. He moved to Batavia in 1833 and was elected and served as Clermont County’s prosecuting attorney until 1840.

While in Clermont, Jolliffe was among the founders of the Batavia Antislavery Society and continually held an officer’s position within the organization. Through an aunt he was granted a position with Batavia lawyer, Thomas Hamer, a protégé of Senator Thomas Morris, from whom Jolliffe also learned and earned his reputation for courtroom


86 Elizabeth Jolliffe, Historical, Genealogical, and Biographical Account of the Jolliffe Family of Virginia 1652-1893, Also the Sketches of the Neils, Janney’s, Hollingworth’s, and Other Cognate Families (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1893), 223.
eloquence. It must have been an awkward work relationship given that Birney and Hamer were on opposite sides of the slavery issue. Hamer, a proslavery northerner, however, split from Morris and Jolliffe in 1833.\footnote{Ann Hagedorn, Beyond the River: The Untold Story of the Heroes of the Underground Railroad (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 188. Thomas Hamer served as a Congressman for three terms from 1833 to 139. He arrived in Clermont in 1818 and was taken under the wings of Senator Morris under whom he studied law. In 1846 he was elected again to Congress but before taking office he died in Mexico as a U.S. General. Hamer’s most famous action was recommending Ulysses Grant for an appointment at West Point.} That year Hamer was elected to a U.S. congressional seat and Jolliffe to the first of several terms as Clermont county prosecuting attorney.

On 26 February 1839 Ohio passed the “Ohio Fugitive Slavery Act,” preceding Congress’s law by more than a decade. The Ohio law called for the maximum of sixty days in the county jail if someone was caught aiding a fugitive slave. The law also leveled a $500 fine on any person who prevented a law officer from arresting a fugitive slave or on anyone who aided a fugitive. The $500 fine also applied to any two people who assembled with the intent to obstruct, hinder or interrupt the removal of a fugitive to the state from which he/she fled.\footnote{Hagedorn, Beyond the River, 182.}

During that same year Jolliffe and Morris spared off in court against their old friend, Thomas L. Hamer. Morris and Jolliffe were defense attorneys for John B. Mahan in Brown County, Ohio. Mahan had been arrested, along with five others, for unlawfully and riotously assembling to disturb the peace of the state of Ohio and for assaulting, striking, wounding and threatening two men, Valentine Carberry and Grant Lindsey. W.C. Marshall and Thomas Hamer served as the prosecutors for Brown County. The jury found Mahan guilty, but the Ohio Supreme Court reversed the decision on appeal.\footnote{Ibid., 187.}
Being an antislavery Democrat, whose views angered Clermont’s proslavery Whigs, caught up with Jollife and he lost reelection and left office in 1840. Within months he had closed his Batavia law office and moved to Cincinnati, twenty miles farther west. There he advertised a law practice “for Hamilton, Clermont, and Brown Counties.” From that time on, his wife, Synthelia, was an officer in the Ladies Antislavery Circle, and Jolliffe served as a trustee of the Colored Orphans Home in Cincinnati. He was also an officer in half a dozen or more antislavery organizations.

Jolliffe actively continued his abolitionist work in Cincinnati. In 1851 he was elected an officer of the State American Antislavery convention held in Cincinnati. At the convention Jolliffe drafted a resolution calling for volunteers against the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. When it came to the issue of slavery, it was very clear that Jolliffe did all he could to assist enslaved blacks. Southerners who wanted to free their slaves sought out Jolliffe for his legal skills. He drew up the necessary documents and guided both slave owners and slaves through Cincinnati’s probate court. He took money only from slaveholders on these occasions; otherwise Jolliffe made his living from writing wills and as defense attorney in minor lawsuits, divorces, and low profile criminal cases. *The Ripley Bee* reported one case regarding a slave. On 7 February 1857 the newspaper reported that Elijah Willis traveled with a female slave and her children to Cincinnati where he died. Willis left a will emancipating the slave and her children. Jolliffe was the

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90 Hagedorn, *Beyond the River*, 189.

executor of this will.\textsuperscript{92} Upon receiving the news of Willis’s death, Jolliffe followed through with the man’s wishes regarding the woman and her children.

His protest of the Fugitive Slave Act made Jolliffe a local celebrity. During the 1850s he unsuccessfully represented slaves in seventeen different fugitive slave cases. Jolliffe had begun representing slaves in 1833 with James G. Birney as co-counsel. They represented a slave named George Washington whom Henry Wills accused of running away and stealing horses. When Jolliffe presented his argument, he was gaveled silent. The Judge denied Birney a continuance, and the court ordered Washington to be sent back to Kentucky.\textsuperscript{93} In his other cases two slaves relented under pressure and returned to slavery. Another three slaves were illegally taken back to Kentucky by their alleged owners without due process, while one slave escaped during the trial. Eleven other cases were decided before the bar. Jolliffe succeeded only once, in a case on behalf of a mulatto slave girl whose master was a drunk and had abandoned her in the city.\textsuperscript{94} In October 1853 Jolliffe and Rutherford B. Hayes defended fugitive slave Louis. When Judge Samuel Carpenter delivered his ruling the court room was packed with supporters of both sides. According to Levi Coffin, Judge Carpenter read his ruling in a low tone, and while listening to the ruling Louis slipped his chair back a little way for more room. No one noticed him sliding his chair back so he kept doing it ever so slightly until he could take a step back, someone in the crowd gave him a hat and he cautiously made his way around the southern end of the room, mixing with the crowd of freedmen and out the court room door. The hunt lasted for a week, but Louis was never caught and eventually made it to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{92} Ripley Bee, 7 February 1857.
\item \textsuperscript{93} Weisenburger, Modern Medea, 103.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 100.
\end{itemize}
Canada. Jolliffe’s cases involved twenty-six adults and seven children whom the Judge or court remanded to slavery during the cases.

His most famous clients were Robert, Mary and Margaret Garner. In 1855 the Garners fled from their owners’ plantations in Richwood, Kentucky to Cincinnati. When the small home they were hiding in was surrounded, Margaret killed her small daughter and tried to kill her other children. Called a modern Medea because of killing her daughter, Margaret Garner caught the nation’s attention. The mere thought of a mother killing her child fascinated the country and once more ignited the debate over slavery.

Jolliffe took the Garner’s case and hoped to prove that previous visits to Ohio by Margaret, her husband, Robert, and her mother-in-law, Mary Garner, meant that they were free. However, he had to find witnesses to these visits since the defendants were slaves and could not testify on their own behalf due to the Fugitive Slave Act.95 His main obstacle was time; he needed time to prepare his case. However, the Garners were reluctant witnesses. They were hesitant to speak to anyone after their arrest and rightfully so. Cincinnati was not a welcoming city to fugitive slaves, and the Garners were most likely distrustful of whites. So they did not cooperate with Jolliffe when he wanted to argue that they should be freed on evidence of their previous visits and the Garners willingly returned to Kentucky. Hoping to gain more evidence, Jolliffe prolonged the trial as long as he could. Jolliffe believed Margaret’s killing of her child made her and the other three adults indictable under Ohio statutes. Jolliffe maintained that the murder charges were arguably preeminent compared to issues of property

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95 Weisenburger, Modern Medea, 104.
handled under the federal fugitive law. In his final argument he argued that the Fugitive Slave Law had driven a frantic mother to murder her own child rather than see the child carried back to the seething hell of American slavery. He stated, “This law was of such a character that its execution required human hearts to be wrong and human blood to be spilt.”

Jolliffe argued that the Fugitive Slave Act was unconstitutional on First Amendment grounds and on the belief that Christians did not have to obey the constitutional injunction. If Christians were required to help return slaves to slavery, then that action interfered with their right of religious liberty and a “right to avoid sin.” He went further, arguing that the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 unconstitutional: “Congress has no right, and never can have, until the First Amendment of the Constitution shall be repealed, to pass any law, by which any man shall be required to aid in the surrender of a fugitive slave.”

In the end Jolliffe lost his case when the Garners willingly returned to Kentucky. They returned to their owners and were sold farther south. At the conclusion of the trial Jolliffe stated, “that even a savage tribe reserved to itself the right to investigate a charge for murder committed within its borders. But the sovereign state of Ohio allowed itself

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96 The Ripley Bee, 9 February 1856.

97 Weisenburger, Modern Medea, 101.

98 Ibid.

and its laws to be overruled by the infamous Fugitive Slave Act made in the interests of slaveholders.”

Even though Jolliffe lost his case, he became a hated man among supporters of the slave institution. In 1857, eighteen months after the Garner case, Jolliffe traveled across the Ohio River to Covington, Kentucky to have dinner with his wife and a couple they knew who lived in Kentucky. On his way to dinner Archibald Gaines, Margaret Garner’s previous owner, attacked him. Gaines struck Jolliffe in the head and continued to strike him. A crowd gathered, Jolliffe ran for safety to a nearby dry goods store. The owner, William Timberlake, however, had faced Jolliffe in court when Jolliffe represented a slave of his, so Timberlake threw Jolliffe back into the street. A few men rescued Jolliffe and escorted him to the ferry. Gaines, with a crowd of onlookers, took a cowhide to Jolliffe’s back until Jolliffe boarded the ferry. Gaines was put on trial for attacking Jolliffe. He was convicted and fined $22.50.

The rulings in the Garner case stayed with Jolliffe. An author of one novel, Belle Scott: Or Liberty Overthrown! A Tale for the Crisis (1856) that documented his argument against the Fugitive Slave Act, repeated verbatim what Jolliffe said in court. His second novel, Chattanooga, was published in 1858. In all likelihood he based a character in it on Margaret Garner. The heroine in Chattanooga, Huldah, a fugitive slave, killed her young son rather than allow him to become a slave.

100 Weisenburger, Modern Medea, 34.
101 Ibid., 6.
102 Larry Gara, The Liberty Line, 129.
103 Weisenburger, Modern Medea, 274.
In 1862, after twenty years of antislavery work, a bankrupt Jolliffe moved to Washington, D.C. and successfully continued to practice law there. He represented southern Unionists who sued the federal government for lands and goods confiscated by the Union army heading South before the Southern Claims Commission. During these years Jolliffe earned the first large fees of his entire career. In one case he won $31,000 in attorney fees. During Reconstruction his caseload increased, and after years of boardinghouse life, he and Syntehlia moved into a home five blocks from the White House. On 23 March 1898 his law office caught fire; and Jolliffe darted inside to salvage papers. Overcome by smoke rescuers carried him from the building and he died five days later from pneumonia.104

Ultimately, the Fugitive Slave Act was a failure on two counts. It was ineffective as a recovery device for fugitives. It was a bigger failure as a compromise measure expected to moderate sectional strife and revive southern confidence in the government.105 In all reality only a small number of fugitives were actually returned under the law. Under the Fugitive Slave Law the recovery of a slave often cost many times the market value of a runaway, and each event was potentially a source of public controversy that might end in violence. Because of that reality only, abolitionists ultimately saw the value of furthering the antislavery case through the Fugitive Slave Act.

According to one abolitionist, the Fugitive Slave Act helped to awaken “the country to the horrors of slavery.”106 Horace Greeley’s New York Tribune was convinced it was a bad investment for slave holders because it “produced a wide and powerful

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104 Weisenburger, Modern Medea, 283.
106 Ibid.
feeling among all classes averse to the institution itself.” 107 The American Antislavery Society reported that the Fugitive Slave Act “has been a successful assertion of arbitrary power in which it has been exerted, so has it also served to bring the system of slavery home to the people of the north as it had never been brought home before.” 108

In Clermont County, part of which abutted the Ohio River, it was inevitable that fugitive slaves would cross through the county, heading to freedom in Canada. It was also inevitable for Clermont residents, especially staunch abolitionists, to become engaged in the Underground Railroad. Fugitives came through Cincinnati, New Richmond, Moscow and Point Pleasant among other areas. 109 Levi Coffin of Cincinnati and Andrew Coombs from Lindale in Clermont County lived “at the intersection of two runaway slave routes one leading from Cincinnati to Ripley and another through New Richmond and Batavia in Clermont County.” John Parker, in Ripley Ohio, used these routes to help fugitive slaves, thus forging a close connection between Brown and Clermont counties. 110

Clermont County residents reacted decisively to the Fugitive Slave Law and the institution of slavery itself, not only by forming the antislavery society but by forming a network to help fugitive slaves. The most popular south to north route in Clermont County followed along the Bull Skin Trace that ran from the Ohio River at the mouth of Bull Skin Creek in Franklin Township up through the villages of Felicity, Bethel, and


108 Ibid.

109 Hagedorn, Beyond the River, 41.

110 Ibid., 233. A large body of information on the Underground Railroad is from the Wilbur Siebert Collection at the Ohio Historical Society. In an attempt to accumulate a complete history of the Underground Railroad, Siebert spent years conducting interviews and corresponding with those who knew anything about Ohio’s Underground Railroad in Clermont County that would indicate where stops on the Underground Railroad were. See also Stuart S. Sprague, ed. His Promised Land: The Autobiography of John Parker, Former Slave and Conductor on the Underground Railroad (New York and London: W.W. Norton 1996), 71-126.
Williamsburg. Another main route ran from New Richmond, generally along present day State Route 132, to Lindale where the Coombs family lived. From there the fugitives were taken to Cincinnati via Ohio Pike. Other routes ran from the Ohio River through Indian Creek Valley of Washington Township to Bethel. The main east to west route was the route The Rev. John Rankin regularly used which followed present day State Route 125, or Ohio Pike as it was named back then.¹¹¹ Routes of the Underground Railroad ran through New Richmond, Felicity, Bethel, Williamsburg and Moscow. Charles Huber, known as “Boss Huber” of Williamsburg, was one of the main station agents involved with the routes.

Charles Huber was a successful farmer and tanner in Williamsburg.¹¹² In his younger years Huber served as an apprentice and traveled south looking for work as a tanner. However, he could not find employment because of slavery. Potential employers told him they used slave labor instead of paid labor. Huber concluded that the system of slavery was bad for the free labor force and eventually that slavery was a sin and from then on he “sought [the] destruction [of slavery] with relentless zeal.” Unhappy about the lack of employment options, Huber returned to Williamsburg where he later inherited his father’s house on Gay Street as well as the family’s tanning business.¹¹³ He ran for state office as an abolitionist candidate several times. In 1837 he collected twenty signatures

¹¹¹ Knepp, Freedom’s Struggle, 94-95.

¹¹² Ibid., 228. Over time Huber purchased many individual out lots adjoining the village of Williamsburg and along the road now known as St. Rt. 276 between Williamsburg and Owensville.

¹¹³ Knepp, Freedom’s Struggle, 225.
on a petition that called for the abolition of slavery and sent to Senator Thomas Morris in Washington D.C.\textsuperscript{114}  

Huber was characterized by David Swing as “bold, outspoken, and fearless to rashness.” Huber’s farm was a central point for assisting fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad in Clermont County. He received fugitives from Moscow, Felicity, Bethel, and New Richmond.\textsuperscript{115} He employed a mulatto man who escorted fugitives to their next stop, which was usually in Clinton County to the north. In 1879, while relating his childhood experiences, Professor David Swing revealed that while living in Williamsburg in 1849, one day he came across the leather tanner, “Boss” Huber, “one of them fearful creatures called an abolitionist.” Swing recalled this incident, stating in a “ravine shady and cool and dark, I came upon Boss Huber and a large negro man.” Swing witnessed Huber shaking hands and giving the black man money. Huber then approached the young Swing and began discussing the issues of slavery and admitted he told the man where he could find work in the North. By the end of the conversation with Huber, Swing, himself, became an abolitionist

Huber was not alone in his abolitionist efforts. Three other men in Williamsburg, Marcus Simms, Samuel Peterson, and Dr. L. T. Pease also participated in Underground Railroad activity. Marcus Simms was a mulatto man born in Virginia in 1820. Employed by Huber as an “engineer,” Simms escorted runaways to the Quaker community of Martinsville in Clinton County or eastward toward Sardinia in Brown County. During the Civil War, Simms, at 43 years old, further demonstrated his commitment to

\textsuperscript{114} Knepp, \textit{Freedom’s Struggle}, 225.  

\textsuperscript{115} David Swing to the \textit{New York Independent}, December 1879, Wilbur H. Siebert Collection, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH.
abolitionism and enlisted in Company B, known as the Ohio Volunteer Infantry. He died on 29 September 1864 at Chaffins farm in Virginia.¹¹⁶

Samuel Peterson served several terms on Williamsburg’s Village Council with Huber and also worked in conjunction with Huber as an “engineer.” Like Simms, Peterson escorted runaways to their next stop. Peterson’s route took him to Isaac Brown’s farm in Sardinia. Peterson also carried food baskets to runaways staying at Huber’s home, and each basket contained a small bottle of paregoric to quiet the children during their escape to freedom.¹¹⁷

Dr. Leavitt Thatcher Pease, a prominent physician in the area, also participated in the Underground Railroad, in all likelihood providing medical assistance to the runaway slaves. Born 20 April 1809 at Martha’s Vineyard, Massachusetts Pease and his family moved to Amelia, Ohio in 1814. In 1832 Pease graduated from Ohio Medical College and opened his practice. In 1834 he married Nancy Fee, sister to Robert Fee, another abolitionist, and they moved right next door to Charles “Boss” Huber. Pease served on Williamsburg’s Village Council in 1849. Huber died in 1854 leaving Dr. Pease as the lead conductor in Williamsburg. Local historian, Byron Williams lived down the street from both Huber and Pease. Williams later wrote that “the last excursion over the road” occurred in the summer of 1860. That year Williams observed Pease and four “stalwart” men, carrying “fine double barreled shotguns,” passing through the village.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Knepp, Freedom’s Struggle, 230. Information provided does not state if Simms died before, during, or after a battle, only that he died at Chaffins Farm in Virginia.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Paregoric is a tincture of opium, typically used in the 18th and 19th centuries to relieve pain and widely used on children for coughs or to calm them down. [http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/08/ajb/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Paregoric.html](http://www.sccs.swarthmore.edu/users/08/ajb/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Paregoric.html), 17 April 2012.

related excursion in the summer of 1860 was the last time Williams witnessed any underground activity. Pease died 24 May 1874 at 66 years of age from heart disease.\textsuperscript{119}

New Richmond residents also provided large abolitionist support. Agents of the Underground Railroad activity included Jacob Ebersole.\textsuperscript{120} Ebersole had a beautiful farm and a fine country mansion located right outside of New Richmond and on the banks of the Ohio River. Ebersole kept skiffs along the river bank and when signals were made on the Kentucky side of the river, runaway slaves he ferried across, put on wagons and driven north to Huber’s farm in Williamsburg.\textsuperscript{121}

Quaker abolitionist Levi Coffin related one incident involving New Richmond residents who assisted two fugitive slaves. Perhaps Ebersole was involved; however, Coffin never gave the names of who assisted the two men. Jim was a slave who lived near Louisville, Kentucky. His parents were free and lived in New Richmond. One year Jim’s owner granted him permission to visit his parents in New Richmond. Unbeknownst to Jim’s master, Jim had plans to run away and to help a friend named Joe to do the same in the process. Jim nailed Joe up in a goods box and shipped him to New Richmond as a “present” to his parents. The box, with Joe inside, was shipped to Cincinnati and from there to New Richmond. Once in New Richmond, Jim hired a wagon to deliver the box to his parents, and Joe was safe and sent to Levi Coffin in Cincinnati.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{119} Knepp, \textit{Freedom Struggles}, 231.

\textsuperscript{120} Other New Richmond residents who assisted Ebersole were James Buntin, Isaac Brown and Benjamin Rice. Although these men are listed as assisting fugitive slaves there is little information on them.

\textsuperscript{121} W. P. Fishback to Wilbur H. Siebert, 25 May 1892, Wilbur H. Siebert Collection, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH.

\textsuperscript{122} Levi Coffin, \textit{Reminiscences of Levi Coffin the Reputed President of the Underground Railroad: Being a Brief History of the Labors of a Lifetime in Behalf of the Slave, with the Stories of Numerous Fugitives,}
Professor James K. Parker, whose father founded the Parker Academy, also recounted abolitionist activity in Clermont County. Professor Parker taught at the Academy himself during the 1840s, and after the Civil War, rumor was that the school itself was a stop on the Underground Railroad. In 1892 Parker recounted that, “Although [I am] an old time abolitionist. . . I never was in any way connected with the road, [or] acquainted with the very few who were concerned in the extradition of slaves.”\(^{123}\) Yet he stated that the most noted station agent in Clermont county was Charles Huber and that Parker’s brother-in-law, Thomas Donaldson, at 85, had been very active in the Clermont County Antislavery Society. Parker also indicated that Donaldson was “well versed in the history of the society and the entire revolution of public sentiment and action.”\(^{124}\) After asking his brother-in-law about Underground Railroad activity, however, Parker obtained no additional knowledge of persons and events in connection with the Underground Railroad in the county.\(^{125}\)

Other antislavery men in the county denied any connection with the Underground Railroad. In 1894 Phillip Chatterton of Williamsburg declared, “I am the oldest of the antislavery men about here, in fact the oldest in this village. . . I had no connection with the Underground Railroad . . . I have forgotten the names of the most active…. I am left

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\(^{123}\) James K Parker to Siebert, 30 March 1892, Wilbur H. Siebert Collection, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus.

\(^{124}\) James K. Parker to Siebert, 20 April 1892, Wilbur H. Siebert Collection, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus.

\(^{125}\) Ibid.
alone.” Chatteron’s letter represents a debate in researching the history of the Underground Railroad. With the end of the Civil War it became popular to have been an active abolitionist and many people suddenly became ardent abolitionists. Siebert’s work is criticized because he believed every story sent to him and did not take into consideration the age of the person. Some younger people were children during that time and took no part. Many of the abolitionists themselves had already died. Siebert did not take into consideration these factors when conducting his research and writing. Gary Knepp’s work is the most recent study on Clermont County and is considered by many in the county as an authoritative account. However, these residents fall into the group Larry Gara discusses in *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*, who want to believe that their hometown area was a “hotbed” of abolitionist activity and that the county was almost 100 percent abolitionist. However, when writing about the routes used in Clermont for the Underground Railroad, Knepp has no citations, nothing to back up his statements.

The extended Fee family was an example of one family that assisted fugitives. The Fees of Clermont county were cousins to famous abolitionist John G. Fee the co-founder of Berea College, and one of the leaders of Camp Nelson. Thomas, son of Robert, lived in Felicity and William lived in Moscow. Thomas Fee, Sr., Robert, and William lived in Moscow. William Fee owned his own mercantile store and Robert owned a ferry and carried people to and from Kentucky. The Fee Villa, home of Thomas

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126 Philip Chatterton to Wilbur Siebert, 10 September 1894, Wilbur H. Siebert Collection, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH.

127 Camp Nelson was a 4,000 acre Union base of operations during the Civil War. Fee was a leader and missionary at Camp Nelson. Berea College provided a unique educational experience during Reconstruction by opening its doors to students regardless of race, gender or class. “Historical Overview of Camp Nelson,” [www.campnelson.org](http://www.campnelson.org), (accessed 3 June 2012).
Fee, a stop on the Underground Railroad. Although local historian Richard Crawford wrote that the villa was “the center of the Underground Railroad activity in Clermont County,” references do not support this. It was also rumored that a tunnel connected the Fee Villa to the Speath House, Robert’s home, located across the street so that fugitive slaves could be easily hidden, by the Fees, from slave catchers in the basement of both homes.\(^{128}\)

Robert Fee’s involvement with abolitionist activity resulted in him receiving a beating. In 1842 Fanny Wigglesworth and her children were kidnapped by six armed Kentuckians, on the premise that Fanny was a runaway slave. Governor Thomas Corwin of Ohio and his brother Robert hired Robert Fee as an agent to bring the family home. Fanny Wigglesworth and her family lived near Fee and he would have been able to identify the woman while searching for her. Fee devoted himself to their rescue and followed Wigglesworth and her children to a distant state, but the family was lost. While trying to find them, a proslavery mob attacked Fee. After the mob incident Robert Fee barred his doors at night, and he and his family, including his daughters, slept with loaded firearms in ready reach, and that Fee burned a light in his window at night to assist any runaways.\(^ {129}\)

Apparently Underground Railroad activity in the town of Felicity began in the 1850s. Oliver Perry Spencer Fee, son of Felicity’s founder William Fee and cousin to the Moscow Fees, was a prominent Democrat and a secret abolitionist. Known as the “High Priest” of the Felicity network, Oliver Fee operated a grocery/dry goods store in Felicity where he fed and clothed runaways. He held municipal and school board positions and


\(^{129}\) Ibid., 148.
was an active Mason. In 1860 he served as a delegate at the National Democratic
Convention. He often praised slavery in order to gain the confidence of slave hunters and
then led them in the opposite direction from the fugitives. Oliver then clothed the
runaways and sent them to Benjamin Rice’s place in Bethel. Fee was not alone. Lewis
Miller also owned a store and fed and clothed the fugitives before they moved on.
Andrew Powell, another prominent Democrat, used his distinctive carriage and team of
horses to transport fugitives. One abolitionist, James Abbott, moved to Felicity in order to
continue to help fugitive slaves. Many individuals provided safe houses for runaways.
Arthur Fee, cousin of William, and Salathial Burrows, both abolitionists living in the
Felicity and Bethel areas provided safe houses for fugitive slaves.  

Located strategically along two major routes, Bethel was a stop for fugitives and
engineers alike. Forming the south to north axis, Xenia Road, or State Route 133, ran
from the Ohio River to Williamsburg. Ohio Pike, or State Route 125, was a critical route
for getting through the county. It ran east to west from the town of Ripley all the way to
Cincinnati where the abolitionist Levi Coffin lived.

Abolitionist Isaac H. Brown was a lay leader at Bethel’s Sugar Tree Wesleyan
Church, one of the earliest Wesleyan churches in Ohio. He was the one who donated the
land for the church. Brown brought fugitive slaves from Felicity to his home in Bethel in
a wagon loaded with oats. From his home Brown led them to “Boss” Huber’s farm in
Williamsburg where the fugitive slaves found their way to freedom.

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131 Ibid., 187.
132 Ibid., 205.
133 Ibid.
Benjamin Rice lived just south of Bethel in a settlement called Rice Town. A carpenter by trade, Rice assisted Brown’s escort of runaways by modifying the wagon. Rice constructed a false bottom in which to carry the fugitive slaves. Anyone checking the wagon saw only a wagon full of oats. Rice and Isaac Brown both picked up runaway slaves in Felicity and took them to their homes in Bethel and then on to Williamsburg.¹³⁴

Not everyone in Clermont County was supportive of abolitionism or individuals active in the Underground Railroad. There was one man, never identified who lived in Bethel and did not agree with this abolitionist activity until he came face to face with it. A mulatto man, who lived in Bethel, he actually helped slave hunters, along with a man named Ephraim M. Cain. Very early one morning, however, the mulatto man’s sister-in-law arrived at the door of Zekiel South, an abolitionist, stating that several fugitive slaves had come to the mulatto’s house for help, and he was feeding them and needed assistance in getting them to the next stop. An astonished South went to the mulatto’s home, and, after talking with the man, South escorted the fugitives to the next stop. When asked why he had helped them, the mulatto man said when faced with the situation he could not turn the people out.¹³⁵

When evaluating Clermont’s antislavery and Underground Railroad history, that while there are gaps, there was persistent abolitionist activity in the county. First person accounts reveal that certain Clermont County families, such as the Fees, Ebersoles and Hubers, were active on the Underground Railroad, but this cannot be said of all the other abolitionists in Clermont County. Other abolitionists, such as Thomas Morris, preferred to engage in persuasive propaganda, signing petitions to abolish slavery or participating

¹³⁴ Knepp, Freedom’s Struggles 207.
¹³⁵ Ibid., 217.
in the lecture circuit. Others like Jacob Ebersole assisted fugitive slaves. The complete history of Clermont’s abolitionist and Underground Railroad activity will always be a mystery.

Picture of D. L.T. Pease’s home in Williamsburg, Ohio. Taken by Bethany Pollitt in April 2009.

A sign on Route 52 East identifying the Palestine Street turn. Taken by Bethany Pollitt in April 2009. This is what is left identifying the town Jacob Ebersole founded that was intended to be New Richmond’s rival.
Historical Marker in New Richmond retelling the story of Jim and his friend in a box. Taken by Bethany Pollitt in April 2009.

Burial marker of Robert Fee located at Moscow Cemetery. Taken by Bethany Pollitt in April 2009.
The Spaeth House, owned by Robert Fee located on Broadway Street, Moscow, Ohio. Taken by Bethany Pollitt in April 2009.

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The disagreement over slavery was not evident merely on the political scene but also in churches across America as well. Nearly all the major denominations, Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist, especially, argued over whether or not it was the church’s place to take a stand on the slavery question. The Presbyterian Church split on the slavery question into the New and Old School Presbyterian church. The Methodist church also split and the Wesleyan church emerged from that split. It was not just the question over slavery that caused the split, but slavery was a large factor in these denominational splits.

Clermont’s religious communities were not immune. Churches faced the same question on the issue of slavery. In instances where they remained quiet on the issue or were pro-slavery, the churches often split. This occurred in Bethel, Felicity and Williamsburg.

In 1837 the Presbyterian Church split into two sides, the “Old School” and the “New School.” The New School Presbyterians believed that the church as a whole should be involved in the problems and causes of the day, such as slavery, and the Old School did not. Many of the Presbyterian churches in New Richmond, Batavia, and Nicholsville were New School.

Presbyterian clergyman Lyman Beecher’s family was probably one of the most famous families in antebellum America. His daughter, Harriet Beecher Stowe, wrote the novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, that created a controversy over the issue of slavery. Many of Beecher’s sons also became Presbyterian ministers. One son, George, pastored in Clermont County, and while there he participated in the organizing of an antislavery society.
Born in 1809, George Beecher studied at Yale College and the Theological Seminary at New Haven. He spent the rest of his life as a Presbyterian clergyman. Little is known about George Beecher. According to author, Samuel Schreiner, he was a perfectionist and constantly disappointed himself, which led to bouts of depression. George was the first Beecher to become an abolitionist.\footnote{Samuel Schreiner, \textit{Passionate Beechers: A Family Saga of Sanctity and Scandal that Changed America} (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 122. Both Samuel Schreiner and Lyman Beecher Stowe state that Beecher pastored in Batavia, New York. However, Clermont county newspapers, the Presbyterian Church, and a book of George’s writings compiled by his sister, Catherine, after his death all put him in Batavia, Ohio for four years. The discrepancy in his location during this time may be because many do not, or have never heard of the small town in Clermont County and state Batavia, New York. The mistake probably started with his nephew Lyman Beecher Stowe who wrote the book, \textit{Saints, Sinners and Beechers} where he state that Beecher was in Batavia, New York. Whatever the reason for the discrepancy Beecher was not in New York but in Ohio.}

Beecher arrived in Batavia, Ohio in 1836 and stayed until 1839. He arrived the same year that James Birney started \textit{The Philanthropist} in New Richmond. He was ordained as a Presbyterian minister at the Batavia Presbyterian Church. Local historian, Aileen Whitt states that George was the speaker at the first antislavery meeting in 1836 at the New Richmond Presbyterian Church; when in fact the speaker was James Birney. His sister, Catherine wrote, he “was settled in Batavia, twenty miles from Cincinnati . . . He labored there four years.”\footnote{Catherine Beecher, ed., \textit{The Biographical Remains of Rev. George Beecher, Late Pastor of a Church in Chillicothe, Ohio and Former Pastor of a Church in Rochester, New York} (New York: Leavitt, Trow & Co., 1844), 11-12.} Upon leaving Clermont County he wrote, “It is with real pain that I leave this church. I have lived among them happily, and believe I have secured the affection of all.”\footnote{Ibid., 42.} George omits in his letters the antislavery society or his abolitionist views during his time in Batavia.

Beecher left Batavia to spend more time “in study” since his college education had been interrupted by ill health.\footnote{Ibid, 12.} In 1843 he pastored at the Presbyterian Church in Chillicothe, Ohio where his life abruptly ended. The coroner did not rule the death to be a suicide or an accident.
On 1 July 1843 while his sister, Catherine, visited, Beecher went out to his fruit trees and was found dead with a bullet wound through his cheek and out of his skull. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote a letter announcing George’s death to the family, and in her letter she told her siblings that his death was most likely suicide, even if the coroners did not rule it as such. George had suffered from depression for many years. She wrote that the cause of the shot was “conjecture however – it is only evident from the wound that death must have been as instantaneous as lightning.” Still it was an untimely end for George Beecher.

Beecher’s contribution to Clermont’s abolitionist movement cannot be overlooked by researchers. The evidence lies in local newspapers from that time. Local historian Aileen White praises Beecher as a boost to the antislavery movement in the county. However, his stay was short and the creation of the antislavery societies would most likely still have occurred. What can be determined is that he was active in the organization while he was in Clermont. Having the name Beecher attached to your organization could not have hurt, given his family’s fame. Beecher did attend the New Richmond Antislavery Society and the Clermont County Antislavery Society meetings. He was an active member and his efforts and support cannot be overlooked.148

The leading Presbyterian Church in Clermont County was the New Richmond Presbyterian Church. Originally named First Presbyterian Church organized in June 1821.149 First Presbyterian hosted guest speakers which included well-known abolitionist George Beecher and John and Alexander Rankin.

147 Schreiner, Passionate Beecher, 124.

148 Beecher is listed in announcements published in the Philanthropists. He held the position of Corresponding Secretary for the Clermont County Antislavery Society. See The Philanthropist, 9 December 1836.

149 Knepp, Freedom’s Struggle, 24.
On 13 July 1836 First Presbyterian held a session that ended with a statement condemning antislavery: “And having come to the conclusion from the word of God and the Universal Consciousness of all of humankind that selling and buying and owning men, women and children as property is unjust and unchristian and a horrid violation of the Community of the Lord our God.”\textsuperscript{150} The group resolved that the church would bar all persons from communion who were slaveholders or defenders of slavery. The statement also demanded that the church wanted to withhold communion to anyone who did have slaves. Although the Cincinnati Presbytery approved the statement, it later expunged without explanation.\textsuperscript{151}

In 1843 First Presbyterian issued a second antislavery statement. This time the church declared that it would not “countenance any who support this sin of sins, this mother of abomination.” It asked for the Cincinnati Presbytery to dissolve connections with churches that supported slavery, and if it did not, “we shall feel bound to dissolve over present connection.”\textsuperscript{152}

The Nicholsville Presbyterian Church was located on the outskirts of New Richmond and it also issued its own statement on 29 March 1843. The church stated the exercise of slavery “directly or indirectly legalizes” the sins of “adultery, fornication, theft, robbery, extortion, and covetousness.”\textsuperscript{153}

Another abolitionist church in Clermont was the Batavia Presbyterian Church. It originally formed in 1829. A decade later, in 1839 the congregation drafted a statement condemning both “intoxicating drinks and slavery.” The congregation resolved, “that we will not permit any minister who is guilty of the sin of slavery to occupy our pulpit” and “that we shall

\textsuperscript{150}Knepp, \textit{Freedom’s Struggle}, 24.

\textsuperscript{151}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{152}Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{153}Ibid.
not receive members from slaveholding churches into our fellowship without examination."\textsuperscript{154}
The examination probably meant that new members would have to agree with the small church’s policies.

A small, but very active, town in Clermont was Lindale. Residents, motivated by their religious beliefs about the evils of slavery and they engaged in antislavery activity. Two of the leading families in Lindale were the Coombs and Tibbets families. They were members of the Lindale Second Baptist Church.

Andrew Coombs, Jr., migrated to Cincinnati when he was about six years old with his family. His father, Andrew Coombs Sr., came to Cincinnati after his stepbrother and cousin, Samuel Tibbets Jr., convinced him to move. In 1812 the two men bought adjoining tracts of land and moved from Cincinnati to Lindale in Clermont County.\textsuperscript{155}

In 1819 a church council met at Samuel Tibbets home and formed the Second Baptist Church on Ten Mile Road, now known as Lindale Baptist Church. Coombs, Sr, donated the land for a meeting house to be built in 1830.\textsuperscript{156} Andrew Coombs Sr., and Jr., both held strong antislavery sentiment and joined the Mt. Gilead Antislavery Society in August 1836.\textsuperscript{157} Descendant and historian of the family, William Carey Coombs, stated in his book, \textit{The Story of Anthony Coombs and his Descendants}, that abolitionist minister John Rankin, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Ripley, Ohio, was a close family friend of the Coombs.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{154} Knepp, \textit{Freedom’s Struggle}, 28.
\textsuperscript{155} Coombs, \textit{Story of Anthony Coombs}, 74.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 74-75.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
Andrew Coombs, Jr., who studied under the Rev. John Rankin, became Rankin’s assistant teacher in Ripley. Coombs, Jr. also purchased land across the road from his father and partnered in a general store at Lindale with his father. He was active in his church, becoming one of the organizers and officers of the county agricultural society, as well as a leader in public improvements and in the antislavery and temperance movements.

Sometime in the 1840s Samuel Tibbets moved his family to Neil’s Creek, Indiana where they continued their antislavery activity and cofounded the Neil’s Creek Antislavery Society and continued to help fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad. After his move, Samuel’s son, John Tibbets, was active in the Underground Railroad both in Clermont County, and after his move, in Indiana. A glimpse into John’s abolitionist activity in Lindale is illustrated by two incidents briefly related by John in an article, “Remembering Slavery Times, written by Grandfather Tibbets in his 70th Year.” The first incident took place in 1838, when John Tibbets and Thomas Coombs helped a man of “not more than thirty” get to Barnstown, Ohio. In 1840 in a second incident John helped a man get to Cincinnati by traveling up to Amelia by the Ohio Turnpike, through Withamsville, both toll roads, before arriving in Cincinnati. When researchers examine the records of the Mt. Gilead Antislavery Society the names of both the Tibbets and Coombs names are listed.

Andrew Coombs, Jr., lived out his life in Lindale. Three of his children attended The Reverend Daaniel Parker’s Clermont Academy and all four sons entered the Civil War on the

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160 John Henry Tibbets, “Reminiscences of Slavery Times, written by Grandfather Tibbets in his 70th Year.” [http://home.davtv.com/philhf/history/johntibbets.html](http://home.davtv.com/philhf/history/johntibbets.html), 17 July 2009. The Tibbets, it is claimed, continued their activities upon moving to Jefferson, Indiana. However, the holders of the first hand accounts of John and his wife, Sarah, are not shared with researchers.
Union side. Coombs lost three sons to the war and his youngest daughter to consumption. Coombs also died of consumption in 1864.\footnote{Coombs, \\textit{The Story of Anthony Coombs}, 95.}

The Methodist church in Clermont County did not take an active stand as did the Baptist and Presbyterian churches in the county. However, there were members of the Methodist church who were members of the antislavery society.

Early on in its history, however, the Methodist Episcopal Church did make a statement against slavery. The goal of the Methodist church was to reform all of society and establishing the kingdom of God in a practical way on earth.\footnote{Wane E. Caldwell ed. \\textit{Reformers and Revivalists: The History of the Wesleyan Church} (Indianapolis: Wesley Press, 1992), 32.} As early as 1784 at its Christmas conference the Methodist Episcopal Church declared slavery to be contrary to the golden rule and contrary to the inalienable rights of mankind. The conference adopted strict regulations on slavery, and by 1785 required members to “evidence their desires for salvation by refraining” from slavery.\footnote{Ibid., 33.} However, in the southern United States many slave owners forbid pastors to preach to their slaves. So in June of 1785 a conference in Baltimore suspended these pastors, and the church came under intense pressure to be silent on slavery.\footnote{Ibid.} Although the church saw slavery as a great evil, it compromised and weakened the 1784 rule. The church required traveling preachers to free their slaves. The southern Methodist churches required to provide opportunity for slaves to hear God’s word and to attend public worship and have provisions for Negro preachers and members to have equal rights with whites. This practice was not always applied in reality. By 1844 the Methodist Episcopal Church was the largest religious body in America, and the church was finding it difficult to maintain its status as an agency of reform. This became evident with
the issue of slavery. The 1785 compromise to be silent on the slavery question did not appease the growing abolitionist population of its congregation. At the 1836 conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, the Methodist Church divided into three parties: those against slavery; those who defended it; and those who would not get involved. The abolitionists were outnumbered and the conference issued this final word on abolitionism again asserting, “we have come to the solemn conviction, that the only safe, scriptural and prudent way, for us, both as ministers and people, is wholly to refrain from this agitating subject.”

After 1836 bishops threatened to fire pastors who supported abolitionism or assigned them to less than desirable fields. New members who were abolitionists were denied employment. By 1848 Methodist churches began to split because of the frustration and disagreements among members. Several of Clermont county’s Methodist churches split and formed the Wesleyan Church.

The Sugar Tree Wesleyan Church was located in Tate Township, on the outskirts of Bethel. The church was originally formed in 1845, before the official 1848 split and was Clermont’s first Wesleyan Church. The church’s first meeting was held at the Nicholsville Presbyterian Church and the group met there for three years until Isaac H. Brown donated land for the meeting house. Members of Sugar Tree included abolitionists Benjamin Rice and Daniel Fee.

Sugar Tree was an antislavery church and the opposition to slavery was the primary reason for the church’s creation. However, by 1870, with the outcome of the Civil War, members left for churches built in more central locations in the county and Sugar Tree was closed, today the church is an empty lot with a few graves.

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165 Caldwell, Reformers and Revivalists, 35-36.
Like Sugar Tree, the Felicity Wesleyan Church was formed in 1847, prior to the official 1848 split of the Methodist church. Matthew and Nelson Gibson and John and William Sargents are listed as the first members in *The Philanthropist*. In 1851 the debate over slavery created a split in Felicity’s Methodist Episcopal Church, causing forty-one members to leave and connect with the Wesleyan Church. The debate originated between The Reverend Wesley Rowe and Mifflin Harker in town, but it continued in the newspaper. Harker and Rowe traded barbs for over a month, leading to a town wide debate at the Felicity Methodist Episcopal Church where three weeks of discussion covered the questions; “Should Churches be open for discussions on slavery? Should ministers preach against it? Should slave holding be made a test of Christian fellowship?” The three weeks of well attended discussions and in the end the public debate was the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back for Methodist Episcopal Church member Joseph Paris and forty others. Many of these defectors were prominent citizens and longtime Methodist Episcopal Church leaders. The new antislavery members brought social respectability to the Wesleyans.\(^{166}\) Felicity Wesleyan Methodist Church prospered until the end of the Civil War. With the end of slavery the purpose of the church became moot and the members left. Today the building still stands, but is vacant.

The town of Bethel had an early history of church and antislavery sentiment working together. By 1860 the Regular Bethel Baptist Church had a sixty-two year old abolitionist tradition. The church founded by the Denhams and Becks families.

In 1808 the church attempted to affiliate with other antislavery churches in Kentucky and became a member of the Licking Locust Baptist Church Friends of Humanity. On 22 December 1805 Bethel resident Jeremiah Beck was appointed to write to the Friends of Humanity and inquire about the Regular Bethel Baptist Church associating with the organization. The Regular

\(^{166}\) Knepp, *Freedom’s Struggle*, 176.
Baptist Church is among the group’s membership list; however, the records place them as being in Kentucky instead of Ohio.

Clermont County also had a proslavery history with an interesting twist. A prominent proslavery advocate was Methodist clergyman, The Reverend George C. Light. Light was proslavery and favored the southern branch of the Methodist Church. He also was an agent of the American Colonization Society in 1832. He worked for the Kentucky Chapter and traveled throughout Kentucky. During the 1830s Light was a pastor in New Richmond.

In 1833 Light wrote to The Reverend R. R. Gurley in Cynthiana, Kentucky that seventy-three blacks had left Louisville to join thirty-three others who were waiting at Shawnee town before continuing on to New Orleans and then Liberia. Light informed Gurley that they were “young and healthy, some of them can read and write.” 167 Half of the group was under twelve. Traveling with that group was Samuel Jones, a black man from Brown County, Ohio, who intended to go to Liberia and then return to the U.S. and report on the situation to another group of blacks in Brown County. Light stated that “it was truly cheering to see the fortitude . . . at leaving the country that gave them birth for the land of their fathers, a country they can call their own.” 168

Light’s business practice, however, was questioned by the Louisville Herald. The paper criticized Light for taking what appeared to be a generous salary for his work with the American Colonization Society. He raised $1,113.67 but deducted $725 as salary and another $15 in expenses. 169 The paper stated, “If so small a part of the amount collected for the benevolent purposes of colonization finds its way into the treasury of the society, we apprehend that many

167 Knepp, Freedom’s Struggle, 38.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid., 38.
who are favorably disposed to it will withhold aid.”\(^{170}\) The last information found on his career with the Colonization Society. Light later became a bishop in the southern Methodist Church and died at Vicksburg in 1860.\(^{171}\) His home, now a bar, despite Light’s proslavery stance, is now listed by the Clermont County Visitors Bureau, in Clermont’s Underground Railroad tour.

For strong religious supporters of the abolitionist movement the source of education of their children was important. When they could, they sent their children to schools run by abolitionists. For abolitionists in Clermont this school emerged in 1839 when the Reverend Daniel Parker opened the Clermont Academy to further his antislavery message.\(^{172}\)

Parker’s goal was to preach plainly to the people so as to keep their attention. He not only lectured for the Clermont County Antislavery Society, but he also established the Clermont Academy on his property and opened it to all races and both sexes.

Like the Reverend George Light and James Birney, in the beginning Parker was a colonizationist. He lectured for free on behalf of the American Colonization Society, but wrote in his autobiography that he began to believe that colonization could never be a remedy for slavery because in twenty years the colonization movement had only removed 5,000 African Americans from America, while the annual increase of the slave population in the United States was 70,000.\(^{173}\) The experience of working with Kentucky slave owners changed Parker’s perspective. The Kentucky slave owners informed Parker that he did not understand slavery as they did, and although they agreed with the idea of sending free blacks to Africa, they did not want to give up

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\(^{170}\) Ibid., 38-39.

\(^{171}\) Ibid., 39.

\(^{172}\) Knepp, *Freedom’s Struggle*, 132.

\(^{173}\) Daniel Parker, *Autobiography*, 225. Reverend Daniel Parker’s story is one that has been told but only by local oral history. His autobiography has been kept in private family collection, and his writings provide an honest history and information that has not been found before. His writings are over 200 pages hand written and are surprisingly honest when describing his membership in the antislavery society.
their slaves. Because of these experiences, after two years of lecturing and collecting money for the society, Parker lost faith in the American Colonization Society, seeing it as a proslavery organization and left the American Colonization Society to join the Clermont Antislavery Society. In his departure from the American Colonization Society Parker did something different. He conducted meetings in the area to explain his actions and stated that he met with little encouragement and “frequently was treated with abuse if I attempted to hold a meeting especially in defense to abolition.”

Parker’s autobiography apparently is the only extant written work of any member of the Clermont County Antislavery Society. Parker documented his life as a lecturer, colonization agent and then abolitionist. He wrote that American slavery was a great growing evil “that occupied my thoughts for many years and I was anxious that some event in providence might occur which would put it in my power to aid in its removal [I] believe if left alone it [slavery] would prove the cause of our national overthrow.”

The Clermont County Antislavery Society appointed Parker to lecture throughout the county. This was a difficult task since traveling was uncommonly bad and many parts of the county were thinly settled. Not only did travel make lecturing on abolition a difficult task, but many of the residents of Clermont were not forthcoming on the subject of abolition. Parker observed that Clermont inhabitants, “ignorance and prejudice were like a thick cloud that hung over the people.” Residents believed that if freed, slaves would “murder their former masters,

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174 Parker, Autobiography, 221-22.
175 Ibid, 227.
176 Ibid., 222.
overrun the Free states, either as idle, worthless thieving vagabonds or else would murderwork [sic] the whites and thus monopolize all the employment.177

According to Parker, the abolitionist meetings were seen by residents as incendiaries, disturbances of the peace, and the abolitionists themselves were viewed as enemies to the county, influenced by foreign emissaries, and therefore, Tories.178 Parker also wrote that while the atmosphere was tense, antislavery societies multiplied on every hand; and no matter what, slaves still ran away. Parker concluded that for all the good it did, when the government passed legislation against aiding fugitive slaves that “they might as well legislated against sunshine.”179

In 1839 Parker and his wife, Priscilla, opened the Clermont Academy on their farm between New Richmond and Moscow. Their motivation came from their disdain for the education system or lack thereof in the county. They decided to send their eldest son, James K. Parker, to Hanover College so that when he returned he could teach his younger siblings. The academy opened 4 November 1839 and operated for fifty years, closing in 1889.180 While the academy was open, it educated the children of Clermont county residents and also students from surrounding areas. Even some southern slaveholders sent their children, while other slaveholders just sent their mulatto children. The student body was made up of boys and girls who were white, black, and mulatto.

Clermont County churches represented their citizens. Many church members were also members of the abolitionist societies formed all over the county. Their actions showed in one more way that slavery divided the county. Some clergymen were proslavery, as demonstrated by

177 Parker, Autobiography, 249.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.
The Reverend Light, who worked for the American Colonization Society. Other clergymen were antislavery such as Daniel Parker who opened a school for all races and both sexes. But Clermont’s churches were active in demonstrating how they felt on the issue of slavery. Their views were evident in their declarations to the Cincinnati Presbytery, or in the splits within the Methodist Church and in town debates being held within church buildings. Like other parts of the state of Ohio and in the nation, in general there was no clear majority of abolitionists within Clermont county’s religious organizations or bodies.
Picture of Lindale Baptist Church. Taken by Bethany Polliett in October 2011.
Photograph of The Reverend Daniel Parker. From the Parker Family Collection. Cincinnati, Ohio. Date of picture is unknown.
Conclusion

Clermont County residents, like many Americans, struggled over the issue of slavery. Some communities were more proslavery. Many of Clermont’s residents, however, did all they could to support the abolitionist cause. Those who believed that slavery should end by organized and legal means joined one of the eleven antislavery societies in the county. They followed famous Senator Thomas Morris who was the first Clermont County Democrat to advocate slavery’s end. Like James Birney and Thomas Morris they believed that signing petitions and publishing articles about slavery was the way to end slavery.

While Clermont’s abolitionist history and its role in the famous “underground railroad” has been exaggerated by local historians, and is lacking in detail, this does not mean that there was no participation on the Underground Railroad. Its involvement compares to that of surrounding communities such as Brown County. However, the goal of the abolitionist was to remain anonymous in the work they did and not advertise it, especially after the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act was passed. But there were abolitionists whose stories remain to show us that there were those who did participate in assisting fugitive slaves. Abolitionists like Jacob Ebersole and Samuel Tibbets and Boss Huber believed that slavery should end immediately and that such action had to be taken. They became actively involved in helping fugitive slaves escape from the South.

In conclusion, antislavery activity in Clermont County was similar antislavery activity in Brown and Hamilton counties that also were located near the border line between the North and South. Clermont residents reacted in the way that suited their conscience; their community, and their nation. They debated the issue. They wrote articles that were published in the newspapers. They signed petitions, joined groups, or in a few cases helped strangers escape to Freedom.
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