

# Primary Sources: Conductor on the Underground Railroad Part Two

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Slaves fleeing from Maryland to Delaware by way of the Underground Railroad. Ann Ronan Pictures/Print Collector/Getty Images

*The second in a two-part series*

*Editor's Note: The Underground Railroad was a network of free African-Americans and whites who helped slaves escape to freedom. The "railroad" was a series of stops in homes where runaway slaves could safely hide on their way to the North. John P. Parker was born into slavery in Virginia, but became a free man by 1845. He moved to Ohio, where he worked as an iron maker by day and rescued slaves by night. Parker helped hundreds escape to freedom along the busiest part of the Underground Railroad.*

*Below is part of Parker's own account, assembled from interviews with him in 1885.*

## **"My Mission Was A Dangerous One"**

There was one adventure that required all my skill and resourcefulness. It started when my friend Tom Collins came to me one night very excited. He brought with him one of the free men of the town and a message. It said that there were slaves hiding in the woods in Kentucky about 20 miles from the river.

Their leader had been captured and, with no one to guide them, they were helpless.

I volunteered to go to the rescue. My mission was a dangerous one, so I put a pair of pistols in my pockets and a knife in my belt. A guide led me to the runaways, who were hiding in the woods. There were 10 in all, including two women and their husbands.

We dared not follow the road as we set out, because it was thoroughly patrolled by guards. The woods were dense, so we could travel carefully in the daytime. It was dangerous, but it was a chance I had to take.

## **"The Man Had Not Betrayed Our Presence"**

In spite of my warnings, one man was thirsty and went looking for water. He had hardly got out of sight when I heard him shout. He came racing through the bushes being chased two white men.

As soon as I heard the shout, I made the others lie down. I looked through the bushes and saw our man being led by a rope. He had his arms tied behind his back. The man had not betrayed our presence to the white men.

After they passed, I ordered the crowd to their feet. We needed to get as far away from this spot as we could. We made it to the river ahead of schedule, but there was no boat waiting for us yet. I had no other choice than to go straight down the bank, where we ran into a patrolman. Seeing the size of our group, he turned and ran away. But I knew he would soon send others on our trail.

## **"I Heard The Cry Of Hounds"**

There were always boats about the ferry landing and my one hope was to beat my pursuers to them. Sure enough, I found one boat at the ferry. While we were searching for the oars, I heard the cry of hounds. The patrolmen had caught up to us faster than I thought. I piled the crowd into the boat, only to find it so small it would not carry all of us. Two men were left behind on the bank.

As I started to push off, a woman cried that one of the men on the bank was her husband. Then I witnessed an example of self-sacrifice that made me proud of my race. Hearing the woman's cry, one of the single men in the boat got up without a word and walked to the bank. The woman's husband jumped into the boat as I pushed off.

I knew the poor fellow would be captured. But we had escaped. Collins was surprised and glad to see me. We decided to send the runaways to the home of the Rev. James Gilliland at Red Oak Chapel, about five miles from town. There we left them, and it was the last time we ever saw or heard of that crowd.

**Quiz**

- 1 Finish the sentence below.
- According to the article, Parker took a pair of pistols and a knife with him in order to
- (A) hunt for food.
  - (B) protect the group.
  - (C) give them to the guards.
  - (D) cut the boat's ropes.
- 2 Based on the article, how did Parker try to keep everyone safe from the guards?
- (A) by getting to the river as soon as possible and shouting for help
  - (B) by running along the road and making everyone stay quiet
  - (C) by traveling through the woods and moving quickly to the ferry
  - (D) by walking during the nighttime and racing to the Red Oak Chapel
- 3 Read the paragraph from the section "The Man Had Not Betrayed Our Presence."

*As soon as I heard the shout, I made the others lie down. I looked through the bushes and saw our man being led by a rope. He had his arms tied behind his back. The man had not betrayed our presence to the white men.*

What does the author mean by "had not betrayed our presence"?

- (A) had not questioned our position
- (B) had not moved a lot closer
- (C) had not given away our location
- (D) had not told a lie about us

- 4 Read the sentence from the section "The Man Had Not Betrayed Our Presence."

*After they passed, I ordered the crowd to their feet.*

Which sentence uses "ordered" in the same way as the sentence above?

- (A) The teacher ordered the students outside for an exercise break.
- (B) I ordered an interesting book about the Underground Railroad.
- (C) Marc quickly ordered the numbers from greatest to least.
- (D) The costumes were ordered a long time ago but still are not here.