

Path to Freedom Tour



During the Civil War era, the 'Underground Railroad' was a support network for African-American freedom seekers from the Southern states. For many, Oswego County was the last stop before crossing Lake Ontario into Canada.

With the most documented Underground Railroad sites in New York State, Oswego County provides a glimpse into this significant part of local and national history.

Our residents became involved in the fight to end slavery in the years before the Civil War. Some provided assistance to slaves by hiding them in their homes or helping them find transportation to Canada. Hear their unique stories from a step-on guide.

Learn about Tudor E. Grant, who escaped slavery to settle in Oswego in the 1830s and continued to live here until the 1860s, working as a barber and a silk dryer. His son, Dr. George Franklin Grant was born in 1846 and became Harvard University's first African-American professor. He later went on to invent the golf tee and received a patent for it in 1899. This provided the blueprint for today's wooden and plastic tees.

You'll have the opportunity to hear about the Grant family and other Underground Railroad activities in Oswego when you visit the Oswego County Historical Society located at the Richardson-Bates House Museum.

You'll also see the Buckhout-Jones Building where Tudor E. Grant and another former slave, Charles Smith, operated barbershops in the basement.

After lunch, travel to the Starr Clark Tin Shop in Mexico and the Bristol Hill Church in Volney. A known abolitionist, Clark housed fugitive slaves in his shop from the 1830s to the Civil War. During the 1840s, the church was proud to have both African-American and white members, many of whom were active in the anti-slavery movement.

The step-on guide will point out other documented Underground Railroad sites along the way, including the homes of Orson Ames and Asa Wing. Ames sheltered the famous fugitive William "Jerry" Henry for one night in October 1851. The famed "Jerry Rescue" in Syracuse helped abolitionists successfully challenge the ability of the federal government to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and helped make Central New York a national center for the anti-slavery movement. Fellow abolitionist and noted lecturer Asa Wing promoted equal rights based on a biblical belief in equality.

**Another option of this tour can include:*
A special presentation about Oswego County Underground Railroad sites followed by dinner at Arena's Eis House in Mexico.