

The deadline for the grant application is May 31. Although one resident attended, he just observed. Village attorney Michael Meth and trustee William Lindberg were absent that evening.

**In other news:**

After months of delays and problems, the microfiltration plant project is moving ahead and on path to completion as soon as May 1. The new engineer for the project is David Connelly of HDR.

Eight of the eleven water leaks detected in a recent survey of the village have been repaired. The village was losing 200,000 gallons of water per day. That number

their annual carnival in Veteran's Memorial Park from Jun. 22 through Jun. 25.

The Warwick Valley Humane Society will hold a candlelight vigil for international homeless animals day in the Railroad Green on Saturday, Aug. 20, from 8:30 until 10 p.m.

The board will hold two public hearings at its next regular meeting on May 2 in Warwick Village Hall at 7:30 pm. The first will be a public hearing on the proposed 2011/12 village budget and the other to repeal local law adding Article 3A titled dead end streets to chapter 135 of the village code and passed on Nov. 17, 2008.

- Birgit Bogler

beetles or, in Europe, ladybird beetles. Or by their scientific name: *Coccinella septempunctata*. Many people are fond of ladybugs because of their colorful, spotted appearance. But farmers love them for their appetite. Most ladybugs voraciously consume plant-eating insects, such as aphids, and in doing so they help to protect crops.

SOURCE: NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

# Underground Railroad gives up its secrets

Local towns were important stops on the way to freedom

BY GINNY PRIVITAR

"Have we an Under-Ground Railroad in Orange County?"

An Independent Republican editorial posed this question on June 16, 1859, after a fugitive slave arrived in Chester.

"After examining him and secreting

him until dark," the editorial went, some local people "raised some money, bought him a ticket to Elmira, and giving him a letter to Rev. Mr. Beecher, of that city, they put him aboard of the New York and Erie [railroad] cars bound westward."

The story continues on pages 34 and 35 with maps and photos.

s town-wide effort at ways, gets underway next

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**A SAFE HAVEN**

Fugitives found cover here: The building at the corner of West Main and New Street as it appeared in the early 1900s.

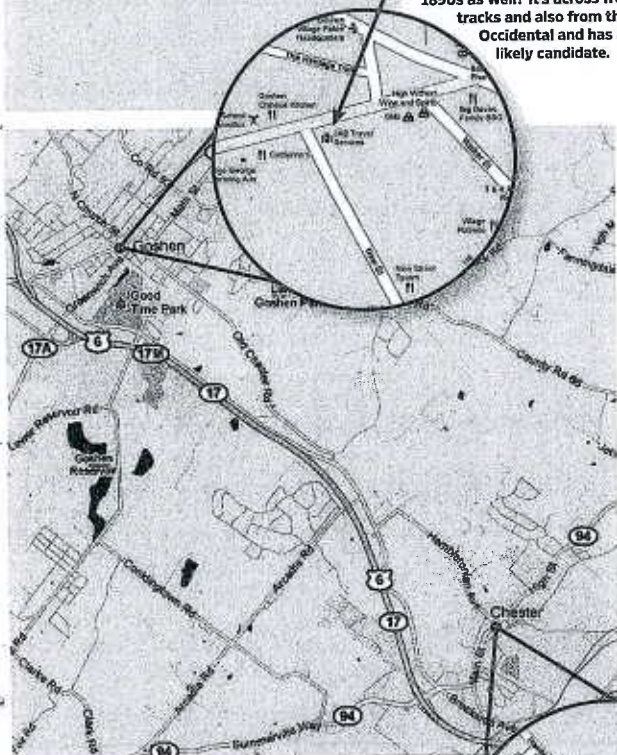


MODERN PHOTOS WITH THIS STORY BY GINNY PRIVITAR

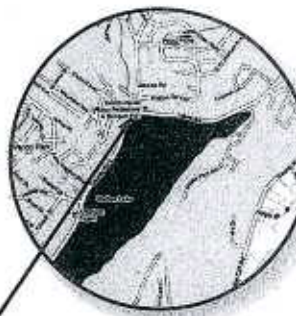
This building was traced back to Vall family members in 1885. Is it possible this was the Vall Bros. store in the 1850s as well? It's across from the site of the railroad tracks and also from the former location of the Occidental and has a side entrance, making it a likely candidate.

**TRACES FROM UNDERGROUND**

The Rev. James W. Wood once lived in the house, pictured below, on the southwest corner of Hambletonian and High Street in Chester. His parsonage offered escaped slaves a brief respite from capture as they made their way north and to freedom. Goshen pediatrician Dr. James Wapshire, who lived in the house from 1964 to 1984, made some interesting discoveries.

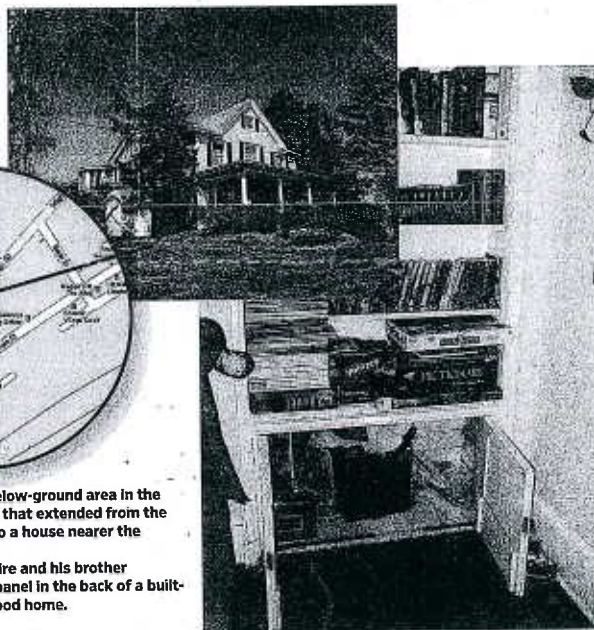


John Milton Bull had property around Walton Lake in Monroe, including a home on Cromwell Hill Road, at the northern end of the lake, above what is now Bocci's Italian Restaurant. According to historians Helen Predmore and Roger A. King, he was a stationmaster of the Underground Railroad and used to ferry fugitives in a curtained surrey-like carriage to the next stop: the Chester Presbyterian Parsonage on High Street.



LEFT: This blocked off, below-ground area in the basement led to a tunnel that extended from the Rev. Wood's parsonage to a house nearer the railroad station.

RIGHT: Dr. James Wapshire and his brother discovered a removable panel in the back of a built-in bookcase in his childhood home.



**Underground Railroad**  
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The paper warned against violating the Fugitive Slave Act, which made it the duty of all officials to assist in the capture of runaway slaves, or any law they might disagree with: "Soon, very soon, will not only this fair fabric of Republican Government, reared at so great a cost by our fore-fathers, fall and go to ruins."

The next week a rival paper, The Goshen Democrat, ran a counter-editorial calling slavery "a crime against nature and against God": "We will...venture to inform our neighbor, that there is an underground railroad in this (and many another) County, and all the dough-faced 'patriots' in the Union can't tear it up."

Some people in Orange County, black and white, put themselves at great risk to help fugitive slaves. Their homes, and the paths that fugitives followed to Canada and freedom, comprised the Underground Railroad.

**The Monroe station**

Fugitives traveled through Warwick and Monroe on their way to Chester, an important railway hub. From there, fugitives could travel north by train or over land. It is difficult to verify local accounts of the Underground Railroad. No one who helped the fugitives escape talked at the time about what they did.

But one first-person account was published in 1885, and reputable historians have taken up the subject. According to Heien Predmore, who wrote "The Chester (N.Y.) Church: A History 1799-1965," some routes extended from Pennsylvania north through New Jersey "and across the Town of Warwick to Walton Lake and then into Chester, where two lines continued northward."

John Milton Bull (1798-1879) was the youngest son of Quaker parents. His home, at the north end of Walton Lake in Monroe, was one stop on the Underground Railroad. Bull used a carriage with curtains to bring runaways to Chester.

According to Predmore, Bull would drive the fugitives into the Presbyterian parsonage barn of the Rev. James W. Wood, on the southwest corner of Hambletonian and High Street in Chester. They were brought into the house under cover of darkness.

Both Predmore and author Roger A. King document the reminiscences of Bull's grandson, Harry C. Bull. Harry remembered from his youth the "old carriage in which fugitives were transported from his grandmother's house (in Monroe) to Chester," according to King's account.

Goshen pediatrician Dr. James Wapshire lived in the former Wood parsonage from 1964 to 1984. He said that he and his brother as children discovered a hollow sound to the wall behind a built-in bookcase next to the fireplace. Investigating further, they found a removable bottom back panel and, behind that, a cavity in which a person could stand.

The basement yielded another surprise. One day the Wapshires' caretaker, who lived across High Street near the present-day 911 call center, surprised Dr. Wapshire's mother by suddenly appearing in her kitchen. He had come through a tunnel connecting his property to the Wapshires' basement and then made his way upstairs.

The caretaker's house was later demolished. The apparent exit in the Wapshires' basement looks like a window, but it is below grade level. It was subsequently blocked off and painted. Its current residents know nothing of its history. Was this tunnel used by fugitives to enter the caretaker's house, which is closer to the railroad?

**Dodging the marshal**

Although not as important a stop as Chester, Goshen also played a role in the Underground Railroad. Ambrose Spencer Murray, director of the New York and Erie Railroad from 1853 through 1867, lived in Goshen and was a staunch abolitionist. He was said to have left tickets and passes expressly for fugitives at the Erie station.

When federal marshals and slave owners were searching for escaped slaves in Chester, the fugitives might be put off on a side track at Goshen, or cross the tracks to the Vail Brothers dry goods store on West Main Street (across from the Occidental Hotel, which was near the present-day post office). They could hide among the boxes and barrels in the basement before continuing their journey. If pursued, they could escape by a side door.

An African-American from Goshen, Matthias Droyer, purportedly assisted store owners Wilmot M. and Robert Montgomery Vail in their efforts. Dr. Graham, whose dentist's office was above the Vails' store, also helped.

In the June 11, 1885, edition of The Orange County Farmer, Wilmot first described the plight of an African-American family with two children who arrived at his store closely pursued by their slave owner and a federal marshal. With the help of Dr. Graham and local black citizens, Wilmot managed to outwit and ultimately intimidate the pursuers (see his account, right).

Thanks to a few brave souls, Orange County can claim some moments of grace in the history of slavery in the United States. The split in sentiment in the Democratic Party helped the anti-slavery Republican Party in 1860 elect a little-known moderate to the presidency: Abraham Lincoln.

Slavery, and whether it would be allowed to continue, was the central cause of the bloody war to come.



**I came early to the conclusion that something was wrong...and [that] determined me to be an abolitionist."**

William Henry Seward

**Terrified family finds protection**

This account by Wilmot Vail was first published in The Orange County Farmer in 1885. Sue Gardner, local history librarian at Albert Warner Public Library and architect for the Historical Society of the Town of Warwick, transcribed this 1909 retelling from a newspaper clipping now in the collection of the Town of Warwick Historical Collection.

I enlisted in the cause in 1847 when living at Goshen at the age of 19 years, and I was the recognized "agent" of the system at that station. Sometimes fugitives arrived on foot and sometimes a friendly conductor of a railroad would help them on their way. At Newburgh there was a colored man named Aلدorf, of a family of musicians, who provided for and concealed fugitives until an opportunity came to send them north. I had a friend named Coddington, an abolitionist and Erie Railroad conductor, who carried many fugitives on his train westward to Buffalo on tickets given to me for the purpose by Hon. Ambrose S. Murray, of Goshen, who was a director of the railroad, bank president, and represented his district in Congress. These tickets were especially marked. If the party was closely pursued by his owner and a U.S. Marshal, we sent him in the opposite of Newburgh.

I never experienced any trouble in securing funds for the cause and I found men of both political parties equally ready to contribute. Among those who backed me was "Bill" Rumsey, a Goshen man, who kept in the background. Another of my secret backers was a dentist who rented a room over my store, named Graham. He was president of the Democratic club, and was above suspicion.

There were many interesting incidents that occurred. The most pathetic one was a sudden appearance in my store of a fugitive slave, with his wife and two children, one an infant borne in his mother's arms. They seemed and appealing look I shall never forget. The man handed me a slip of paper which had on it simply the word "Vail." They said they were closely pursued, knowing that no time must be lost I opened the trapdoor to my cellar and hurriedly sent them below. From the cellar a door opened to the outside of the building. I then pulled a knob which rang a bell in the dentist's room. Graham understood the signal and rushed down in his shirt sleeves and I had not more than made him acquainted with the situation when I rushed a United States Marshal and the owner of the slaves. In the meantime, Graham had hurriedly obeyed the instructions I gave him, to go downstairs and get the fugitives out, which angered and disappointed in his prey escaping. [The marshal] said to me, "I want you." "I suppose so," I replied, "what do you want of me?" During this brief colloquy Graham had sized up the situation and passed the word among the colored population to rally in my defense. Within the space of ten minutes there were at least one hundred Negroes gathered in front of my premises ready for a fight. Things looked serious for the U.S. marshal when Graham came in and explained that he was the chairman of the Democratic club of Goshen.

He said, "Now look here, Vail hasn't those people. I'm a Democrat. They went on the train that just went to Middletown." That little speech saved us. The train was still standing at the depot and the marshal and slave driver jumped aboard and were carried off. In the meantime arrangements were made to get the fugitives out of town and the milk train came along and they were put aboard and taken to Newburgh and Aلدorf took them in charge. An hour later the marshal came back to Goshen furious over the trick that had been played and said to me, "We will take you anyway. You are under arrest. We will take you to Fort Lafayette." It was then about dusk and observing the Goshen Negroes were standing on the corners ready for a fight, the marshal concluded it advisable to let me go, and that was the last of this episode.



This man bears the scars typical of the vicious punishment meted out by slave owners to runaways that were captured.

**William Henry Seward: More abolitionist than Lincoln**

Best known for his purchase of Alaska — known at the time as "Seward's Folly" — William Henry Seward was more fiercely abolitionist than Lincoln himself. He galvanized public sentiment against slavery, and offered refuge to fugitives traveling the Underground Railroad.



Seward was born in Florida, N.Y. in 1801. He was a governor of New York, a United States Senator, and Secretary of State under Lincoln and Johnson. This member of the emerging Republican Party was the front-running candidate for president in 1860. But his outspoken stand against slavery probably cost him the nomination, which went to the more moderate Abraham Lincoln. Despite this, he was an able member of Lincoln's cabinet.

Seward hated slavery from a young age. His father, Samuel Sweeney Seward, who founded the S.S. Seward Institute, owned several slaves. As a boy, Seward deeply felt the inequality between the races.

"I early came to the conclusion that something was wrong," he said years later.

He and his wife, Frances, opened their home in Auburn, N.Y., to escaped slaves. The house is a museum today.

Seward was elected to the Senate in 1849 as an antislavery Whig. The following year, he gave his "Freedom in the New Territories" speech, considered one of the most important speeches in the Senate's history. He argued that expanding slavery into the new western territories was contrary to a "higher law" — a moral law established by God. He hoped to see a peaceful end to slavery but foresaw the coming conflict.

More than 100,000 copies of his speech were distributed and printed in newspapers throughout the country.

In 1858, in his second term in the Senate, Seward gave another significant speech in which he argued that the economic and political systems of the North and South were incompatible. This "irrepressible conflict" would lead to the "collision" of the two systems, he said. The nation would become "either entirely a slaveholding nation, or entirely a free-labor nation."

His words electrified people on both sides of the slavery question. Many heard his speeches as a call to arms.

In 1859, white abolitionist John Brown tried to start an armed slave revolt by seizing a United States Arsenal at Harpers Ferry in Virginia. Outraged southerners saw this as a direct result of Seward's speeches. A Richmond, Va., paper went so far as to carry an advertisement offering a price on the head of abolitionists — and the sum of \$50,000 for Seward's head in particular, according to Robert Taylor's book, "William Henry Seward: Lincoln's Right Hand."

**\$100,000 REWARD**

WARRICK, EDITORS: I WILL be one of one hundred gentlemen who will give twenty-five dollars each, for the heads of the following Traitors: And I will also be one of one hundred who will pay \$500 each (\$50,000) for the head of William H. Seward, and would add a similar reward for Fred Douglas, but regarding him head and shoulders above these Traitors, will permit him to remain where he now is.