

Now, I always have to give everybody the big picture before I go into the small pictures. So, keep in mind, Caroline County is probably nationally unique in three ways. One, we have this 300-year history of no industry besides agriculture. There's probably only a handful of, counties in the United States that can say that.

Remember, we didn't have a seafood industry that other counties on the Eastern Shore had. In terms of our military participation, we've had men in every single major battle in the United States except for two. No county in the United States can exceed that. And finally, we have a really remarkable underground railroad history, and, I say, it's probably the best underground railroad history of any county in rural America, and I stand by that. '

Sort of the big three of the underground railroad and African American history in the middle of the 19th century are here. Frederick Douglass, in his three autobiographies, he talks about incidents that occurred in the town of Hillsboro, in 1827 involving his family that had a profound effect on him, including the division of his family among various slave owners.

Very few people know it, but, Frederick Douglass's grandmother sold fishnets in Denton, he says in his autobiography. And also his wife, Anna Murray, who's much, much overlooked, a great figure in the underground railroad, and needs to be recognized more, and we're gonna do something about that. Frederick Douglass's wife was, from Denton and an active underground railroad member and agent.

Harriet Tubman's three most famous and best-described rescues, occurred in, Caroline County, including the rescue of her parents that you'll see over there. This is where she got an axle and she hooked it up to an old horse with a straw collar. Of course, we've drawn Secretariat. The artist put Secretariat in there pulling her, but she drove that axle all the way to Wilmington, Delaware. Again, probably her most daring rescue.

And this was probably where, Poplar Neck in Caroline County where she began her own escape to freedom. Finally, we have the William Still family saga. Two of the really greatest books on the underground railroad, probably the most famous, is The Underground Railroad written by William Still, and another book written about his brother called The Kidnap and the Ransom. And that saga began in Caroline County on a plantation,, that was out near where, the 4-H Park and Girl Scout Camp are today. And we have members, of the family that were involved in this. And raise your hands. Oh, they're all here.

It's Jeff Smith and, and his family. So we have some visitors, from the north, that are here. And of course, we have Preston, which was the nexus of the underground railroad, really for the Mid-Shore region with networks, Quaker network on the east side, Harriet Tubman and her appearance, appearance on the right side.

There's a, a great, historian down in Dorchester County named John Creighton. And John Creighton always said, "Somerset, Dorchester, Talbot, Queen Anns is where everyone was running from, and Caroline

County was where everyone was running to." And, he's really right about that. Part of it, of course, was geography. You know, we're in the central part of the Eastern Shore. You have to go across here to get to Delaware. But it goes well beyond that. Caroline also was traversed by these Indian trails that ultimately became the roadways that people traveled on. Today Route 16 is an old Indian trail, the Choptank Indian Trail. 313 up to Greensboro, same thing.

So geography is important, but really the reason that the underground railroad has such a remarkable history in this county, is because of the people that were here, and to start with a free Black population. There was a large free Black population in Caroline County, even in 1840 at the time of Moses Vining. Probably about 50% of the African Americans were free at that time. And by the Civil War, 79% of the African Americans in Caroline County would be free, and probably a large percentage of those remaining in bondage were, to be manumitted or freed at a specified time.

But Caroline County was also occupied by a lot of small white farmers. They were accustomed to seeing sort of strangers, free Blacks in the area, so that was no surprise. And I'm sure, frankly, like today, they didn't much care if somebody's property from Talbot County was running away through Caroline County.

And then finally, there was a real active group of abolitionists in Caroline County, and they came from a variety of different things. One of the earliest abolition societies in the United States was in Greensboro. It's called the Choptank Abolition Society. Then

there were this network of five Quaker meeting houses that ran from the southern part of the county up to the northern, through the northern part of the county. One of those meeting houses is, of course, over in West End. Don't we have a picture of that somewhere? That's one of our projects. We, we kept it from falling down, but it's one of our projects.

And then finally, the Methodists. The big wall on the other side of this room was part of a plantation called, Skellington's Right. And, William Frasier, who was a veteran of the American Revolution, was convinced by Bishop Asbury to free his slaves. So a lot of the Methodists and other people were active in the abolitionist movement, which made Caroline this place where everybody ran to.

And finally, you know, it's important to point out that the waterfront itself was an important stage. Next to Poplar Neck, possibly the waterfront in Denton is one of the critical points in the underground railroad. And just as an example, and I'll, I'll put those over there and you can get a copy or we can pass them out now, are three runaway slave ads, one from 1803, one from 1816, and one from 1802- [laughs]... about sailors who escaped, um, from, uh, bondage..... on the waterfront in Caroline County.

So, you know, it's a remarkable history, Adam, Aaron, and, and Lewis. And, you know, I'm sure their names haven't been said in a public meeting for a long time, and they never expected probably in their day that such a thing would happen, but we need to remember these people and their remarkable stories.

And finally, down on the waterfront, one of the dramas was an underground railroad agent named Hugh Hazlitt is captured in the northern part of Caroline County. He's brought in chains down to the waterfront, put on the steamboat Kent, in 1857, and sent to Dorchester County where he's sentenced to 44 years in prison. This, this being in the underground railroad, was dangerous, dangerous, business.

The Lepperton family, that we talk about, they were a mob of 50 men headed up from Dorchester County. One newspaper said they were gonna hang them. Another newspaper said they were gonna tar and feather them. So, you know, there's remarkable courage that was being shown by all the people that were involved in the underground railway.

And one of the groups that's under, overlooked a lot of times are African Americans themselves. Most of the African Americans in Caroline County were free because their families were buying them out of bondage on a regular basis, so that's really, really important, that African American families, worked hard to free the members of their families that were enslaved.

Okay. The setting for the escape of Moses Viney, the stage in 1840 down on the waterfront. Now, again, the river, as Kathy pointed out, is really two things. It's a guideway. If you follow the Choptank River, you are heading in a northeast direction, and it's going to take you over into the Dover-Smyrna area, where their networks of the underground railroad will operate. So it, it's very important that Choptank River is

the guideway, um, on the eastern shore of Maryland for the underground railroad.

It's also an impediment, particularly if, like Moses, you end up on the west side of the Choptank River. How are you gonna get across it? At the time of Moses Viney in 1840, there were only two bridges, Dover Bridge and this bridge here, and then you had to go up to Greensboro. So there were, bridges not there, and it was difficult, so you had to walk either to the top past Greensboro, or you could wade across it, or you had to cross one of these, bridges. Now, West End, what was West End in 1840? West End probably had 12, we don't have a map of it, but based on land records and the 1807 map, there's at least a dozen maybe, or more houses over in West End. There's a series of granaries. There's a ship building operation that's down there. They're building schooners and, which are two-masted and four and a half vessels, and sloops, which are one, single-masted vessels that are down there. Probably you would've seen tied up at the wharf down there, two schooners, that were involved in what was called the coasting trade, which was up to New England, down to the West Indies.

One was the President, that was owned by Robert Salisbury. His house is that part of his house is that house over in the corner. It's kind of yellow. It's over on Gay Street that we're attempting to save.

And another vessel that would've been down there would've been the Wave, which was a schooner yacht with a fascinating history. I won't get into it, but it was the schooner of Robert Register Emerson. He's

the one who builds the house where Harry's is today later in life in the 1870s.

There would've been no steamboats down at the wharf in 1840 because steamboats didn't arrive in Denton until the Maryland came up in 1842. Now, how do you get across the river? When the town was founded, the town was founded the day that Word arrived, the British had surrendered at the Battle of Yorktown. So, how'd they get across the river?

The way they got across the river at that time was over where the boat club is, there was a ferry boat that ran over, and it came over to the end of North First Street behind the jail, in other words, and North Second Street down here past the museum. So those were the two ferry boat landings. And the reason that Courthouse Green is where it is today is because those were the two ferry boat landings, original ferry boat landings for the town.

In 1791, however, they built the causeway down, on the front, and the ferry boat then started running on a shorter route across there. The bridge that's down there was built in 1811. The guy that built the house up in the front here, Solomon Brown, was one of a group of private individuals that built the bridge from the causeway that was built in 1791. And he builds it in 1811, and it was a, it was a toll for anybody who wasn't a resident of Caroline County.

The construction of the bridge that Moses would've crossed over, it was a pretty kind of rickety thing. It was only one lane wide, and it was originally built with cantilevers. In order to open it, it was cantilevered with

cannons, old cannons that, that went back and forth. It was constantly being, this old wooden bridge, it was constantly being hit by boats as they were going through it. In 1874, the great schooner, the, the George Churchman, there's a model up in the lobby up there, is built up at Greensboro, comes down on the 4th of July and knocks the bridge down completely.

But in 1840, the bridge is, is kind of a rickety one-lane bridge. Again, it's, it has to be a drawbridge 'cause you have to be able to get north to go to Greensboro, et cetera, so it's cantilevered with cannons. Um, the, again, the causeway was built in 1791. Ironically, of course, it's the area that Moses Viney and his friends would come across, and it's almost certainly built with large amounts of enslaved labor. The town itself, of course, had been in existence since 1781. It really takes off 1791, and probably has about 500 people at the time that Moses comes through.