

TOWN HISTORIAN

February 27, 1963

Mr. Arch Merrill:
Democrat & Chronicle
Rochester, New York

Dear Mr. Merrill:

I envy you! No housework to do to interfere with your endeavors! Although my husband will pinch hit at getting luncheon or dinner with a deadline coming up. Or take the school kiddies home that have passed up a bus to pick up material. I hope too to at least get out a pamphlet on Henrietta's part in the Civil War, for I have interesting material. There is a school tour in two weeks, a Tri-Town Festival in May where I should have an exhibit, I'm way behind in my District Schools history. Well, one thing at a time.

As far as I know the Dave Richardson home was an authentic stop on the Underground Railroad. I too have read the clippings and copied them at the Rundel Library. I am sorry to report the house was torn down to make way for the Suburban Height homes. I have heard some say that the Andrews Real Estate house on the corner of the East Henrietta Road and Castle Road was a stop, but it is my opinion that some have confused this with the Richardson house to the south. The Little family used to live at the Castle Road farm, and I never read anything connected with them in this respect. If I run across anything besides what you know, I'll send it right in. There was an Almira Kirby who married a Joseph Richardson here April 15, 1860. They had six children. William K. Richardson married twice, his second wife is living- Dorothy Coolidge Richardson. They had two children, Allie W. and Ralph K. Richardson. They live in Rochester. I could find out from a neighbor there addresses if you feel they might be able to shed some light on this. (from my Genealogy file.)

Tradition has it in West Henrietta, that the Walter Vogel cobblestone house on the east side of West Henrietta Road (5582), West Henrietta, was an Underground Station. The original owner was Abel Post, whose descendants, John Post and sisters, live on Shoreham Drive, Rochester (off Clover St.) Frank Stanton later owned it, also a Mr. Weider and for a short time, Fred Krenzer before Mr. Vogel.

I have an undated clipping given me, which gives the following information: House remodeled by Barr and Creelman for the Frank Stanton's: "A secret room with iron bars at the two small windows on the grade level was found by workmen in a cobblestone dwelling in West Henrietta, modernized by the above Concern. The room was in the cellar; even the shutters on the windows being designed to prevent anyone from looking in. It is believed the room and house may have been used as a station of the 'Underground Railway' to harbor slaves fleeing from the south during the Civil War. Lifelong residents in West Henrietta have always heard this said."

The third I locate on the corner of West Henrietta Road and the Lehigh Station, 4747 W. Henrietta Rd. Mr. John Halpin, Jr. now lives on the place. The present house has replaced the former, which was torn down. According to the 1856 map this is where Mr. James Sperry lived. In an original copy of "The Informer" an amateur newspaper printed by R. J. and F. A. Strasenburgh who lived here around 1880, there appears an article about Deacon Sperry under the headline "Old Residenters." It is a very interesting article of which I will quote a portion:

"Deacon Sperry was a strict ~~totalor~~, and a zealous advocate of anti-slavery. He was a great admirer of Gerritt Smith and Wm. Lloyd Garrison. On one occasion a poor black man escaped from his cruel Master in the south and finally arrived in Henrietta, on his way to Canada. Cautiously emerging from Diver's wood's, half a mile east of Mr. Sperry's house, he wended his way to the home of a farmer in the vicinity and, showing the cuts and stripes on his head and neck caused by the lash of the overseer, he asked for assistance to gain his liberty. The farmer gave him provisions and directed him that night to the residence of Deacon Sperry. "He'll put you through all right" said the farmer. The colored man obeyed instructions. Justice Tomey's notorious Fugitive Slave Bill was then in force, declaring that "A black man had no right that a white man was bound to respect." Consequently it became a crime to assist a slave to gain his liberty. But the sturdy Deacon recognized a Higher Law than that enacted by any earthly tribunal - and that Law bade him "love thy neighbor as thyself." After dark the next evening the close covered carriage of Deacon Sperry might have been seen driving towards Rochester, and at eleven o'clock P.M. the noble-hearted managers of the "underground railroad" were entrusted with our colored brother who in less than 24 hours thereafter found himself breathing the free air of Her Majesty's Dominion the other side of Lake Ontario. The Deacon was a terror to evil doers and a strong tower in defense of the down trodden and oppressed."

As I understand it - these two young editors were about 14 - 15 were they not? Sons of a minister here as I believe. It is past midnight as usual and I am too tired to check this last statement but am sure this is so.

Be sure to do one thing for the hardworking historians who might help you from time to time. They receive very little pay for the long hours they put in. Some I understand, receive as little as \$50. a year or even no pay at all in the "hinterlands." I kid my husband and daughter by saying: "I am the only one who has tripled their salary in this house." In six years I've coaxed them from \$100. a year to \$300. Ah sure and 'tis a labor of love we are doing!
List us in your Bibliography.

Goodnight, and another Good book to your list.

P.S.: Are just writing about the "Underground" or Civil War activity in general in this area?