

# UNDERGROUND RAILWAY

## Underground Railway

Between 1840 and 1860 more than 30,000 American slaves came secretly to Canada and freedom.

**Josiah Henson** escaped to Canada along the **Underground Railroad**, a network of secret paths, hiding places and safe houses that stretched from the southern states to the borders of Canada. Like countless other immigrants, Henson came to Canada as a refugee escaping brutality and **oppression**.

**Josiah Henson** Founder of the **BLACK** settlement at Dawn, UC (bat Charles Co, Md 15 June 1789; d at Dresden, Ont 5 May 1883). Born a slave, Henson escaped to Canada 1830. Four years later he founded the Dawn community near Dresden, UC, for American fugitive slaves. Aided by a white American missionary, Hiram Wilson, he and his associates organized a manual-labour school, the British-American Institute. He was active on the executive committee until the institute closed in 1868. Although a poor administrator, constantly engaged in disputes over finance and management, Henson served as

## The Lyrics

Words and music by G. Scott MacLeod.

Between 1840 and 60  
Thirty thousand American slaves  
Came to Canada to flee inhuman  
treatment  
Beaten and whipped, forced to obey

Underground Railway, Underground  
Railway

Children separated from parents  
Husbands taken from wives  
Surviving on cornmeal and bacon  
A network of hiding places

### CHORUS

Keep your eyes on the Big Dipper  
To heaven it's safe house  
Josiah Henson would be  
A free man says he

### CHORUS

The road to freedom  
Is a mighty long road  
Follow the drinking gourd  
It's one step, two step  
Follow me to freedom  
Follow the drinking gourd

### CHORUS

**Oppress v.** 1. Keep in subjection and

Dawn's spiritual leader and patriarch and made numerous fund-raising trips in the US and England. He published his autobiography in 1849, and he was allegedly Harriet Beecher Stowe's model for the leading character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Jane H. Pearse and William H. Pearse, *The Canadian Encyclopedia* p.979.

**The Underground Railroad**, an informal network of safe houses and people who helped fugitive slaves pass from slave states in the US to free states or to Canada. It has been the object of much mythmaking, for not nearly so many fugitives passed along it, nor were there nearly so many whites involved, as is generally said. Although most fugitive slaves remained in the free states of the American North, perhaps 30 000 reached Canada. The "railroad," in operation roughly 1840-60, was most effective after the passage of the US Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, which empowered slave hunters to pursue fugitives onto free soil. This Act resulted in several efforts to kidnap fugitives who were in Canada to return them to Southern owners.

Robin W. Winks, *The Canadian Encyclopedia* p. 2209.

hardship. 2. Cause to feel distress or anxious.

**The Big Dipper**, which forms part of Ursa Major, or the Great Bear, is the most famous of the constellations. It contains an impressive number of bright stars, but none of them are particularly bright. The majestic silhouette of The Big Dipper is a prominent feature of the northern sky as it revolves around Polaris, the North Star and shines with the aurora borealis. It offers observers a view of some of the most magnificent celestial bodies.

Brunier, Serge. *The Great Atlas of The Stars* p.18

**Books:**

Henson, Josiah. *An Autobiography of the Rev. Josiah Henson ("Uncle Tom") 1789 to 1881.*

**Questions:**

1. What caused the Underground Railroad?
2. Why did American slaves come to Canada?
3. What is a spiritual and why did the slaves use the expression "follow the drinking gourd"?