"We Kept Our Dirt Floors...Clean and White"

THE QUARTERS

There was a lot of cabins for the slaves, but they wasn't fitten for nobody to live in. We just had to put up with them.

-- Mary Ella Grandberry, former slave from Colbert County, Alabama

The clusters of cabins where slaves were housed, some times scattered about randomly and other times ordered with geometric precision, were the definitive element of any plantation. Encoded in the quarters was a complex and contradictory message; they were a sign of the planters' success and the slaves' captive status. Comments from slaveholder and slave alike detail the slip-shod condition of many of these buildings. Slave cabins had chimneys that were prone to catching fire, roofs that leaked, dirt floors, and walls with gaping holes. Nothing more than a place to sleep, the average slave house appeared to be simply one more of the penalties of being a slave. Yet, testimony from former slaves points up their persistent and deliberate efforts to improve their cabins, to keep them in good repair, and to make them as comfortable as possible. In short, many slaves worked very hard to transform their quarters into homes. In this way slaves signaled their reluctance to accept degrading living conditions. With nearly invisible acts, they defied the subservient status conferred on them by the plantation system.

Down in the quarters every black family had a one- or two-room log cabin. We didn't have no floors in them cabins. Nice dirt floors was the style then, and we used sage brooms. We kept our dirt floors swept...clean and white.

-- Millie Evans, former slave from North Carolina

They was built of pine boarding....
The beds was made of puncheons [rough poles] fitted in holes bored in the walls, and planks laid across them poles. We had ticking mattresses filled with corn shucks. We didn't know much about having nothing, though.

-- Mary Reynolds, former slave from Catahoula Parish, Louisiana

Adapted from Slave Narratives - [http://www.archives.gov/](http://www.archives.gov/)

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The Cultural Landscape of the Plantation

The mansions at the larger plantation estates instantly conveyed an image of greatness, authority, and success with their impressive facades, gardens, and formal white columns. But great houses were only a small part of any plantation. The most important elements of any planter's domain actually lay beyond his residence. Here, back of the Big House, is where slaves did the work that produced their owner's wealth. Here a captive people struggled to live as decently as they could. Here African Americans etched their mark on the southern landscape and created cultural traditions that endure to this day.

Built in 1850 for Governor John C. Manning, this classically styled mansion was constructed with granite imported from far-off Rhode Island. Because the house contained many features then regarded as frivolous luxuries, such as running water on the second floor, the house was often referred to as "Manning's Folly."

The Big House was a two-story house; white like most houses during that time. On the north side of the Big House sat a great big barn, where all the stock and stuff that was raised was kept. Off to the southwest of the barn, west of the Big House, set about five or six log houses.

-- William Henry Towns, former slave describing a plantation near Tuscumbia, Alabama

Aerial View of Uncle Sam plantation, St. James Parish, Louisiana (3.3) (Reproduction of a drawing by Joseph P. Marlow, 1940)

Adapted from Slave Narratives - http://www.archives.gov/
"By the Sweat of *Our* Brows"

**Tasks on the Plantation**

I never know what it was to rest. I just work all the time from morning till late at night. I had to do everything there was to do on the outside. Work in the field, chop wood, hoe corn, till sometime I feels like my back surely break. I done everything except split rails.

-- Sara Gudger, former slave from Burke County, North Carolina

The daily routine for plantation slaves was marked by labor from sun-up to sun-down, from "can see to can't see" in the slave's lingo. They worked everywhere on the plantation; in the fields and in the Big House, in the barns and in the quarters. Because they had to make the crop and raise food for the entire plantation community, there was little slack time. Flogged or threatened with beatings if they slowed up even the slightest bit, their toil was relentlessly oppressive. And when they returned to their quarters, there remained still more domestic chores that had to be done at night.

Exhausted and worn down though they were, many slaves nevertheless kept mental accounts of what their labor was worth. They were keenly aware of the fact that a planter's wealth was based on their efforts and they wanted some recompense. At the end of the Civil War, some demanded nothing less than a portion of the plantations where they had been held captive. This they saw as a just wage for their years of forced labor.

I used battling blocks and battling sticks to help clean the clothes when we was washing; we all did. We took the clothes out of the suds, soaped them good and put them on the block and beat them with a battling stick, which was like a paddle. On wash days you could hear them battling sticks pounding every which way.

-- Julia Brown, former slave from Jackson County, Georgia

The cooking was done in the kitchen in the yard. The fireplace was as wide as one end of this room . . . Heavy iron skillets with thick lids were much used for baking, and they had ovens of various sizes. I have seen my mother bake beautiful biscuits and cakes in those old skillets, and they were ideal for roasting meats. Mother's batter cakes would just melt in your mouth . . .

-- Minnie Davis, former slave from Greene County, Georgia

Adapted from Slave Narratives - [http://www.archives.gov/](http://www.archives.gov/)

"A Very Valuable Man"

SKILLS AND TALENTS

My father was a carpenter and old massa let him have lumber and he made he own furniture out of dressed lumber and make a box to put clothes in. And he used to make spinning wheels and parts of looms. He was a very valuable man.

-- Carey Davenport, former slave from Walker County, Texas

Slaves had many noteworthy skills and talents which made plantations economically self-sufficient. The services of slave blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers, shoemakers, tanners, spinners, weavers and other artisans were all used to keep plantations running smoothly, efficiently, and with little added expense to the owners. These same abilities were also used to improve conditions in the quarters so that slaves developed not only a spirit of self-reliance but experienced a measure of autonomy. These skills, when added to other talents for cooking, quilting, weaving, medicine, music, song, dance, and storytelling, instilled in slaves the sense that, as a group, they were not only competent but gifted. Slaves used their talents to deflect some of the daily assaults of bondage. They saw themselves then as strong, valuable people who were unjustly held against their will rather than as the perpetually dependent children or immoral scoundrels described by so many of their owners. Indeed, they found through their artistry some moments of happiness, particularly by telling tales which portrayed work in humorous terms or when singing satirical songs which lampooned their owners.

Lucindy Jurdon reported to her interviewers:

"My mammy was a fine weaver and she work for both white and colored [people]. This is her spinning wheel, and it can still be used. I use it sometimes now."

Adapted from Slave Narratives - [http://www.archives.gov/](http://www.archives.gov/)
"We'll Soon Be Free"

RELIGION

We'll soon be free,
We'll soon be free,
We'll soon be free,
When de Lord will call us home.

-- verse from a song sung at a plantation near Georgetown, South Carolina

Slaves worshiped with great enthusiasm. Religion, after all, provided a ready refuge from their daily miseries and kindled the hope that one day their sorrows might end. Planters actually encouraged religious observances among their slaves hoping that exposure to Christian precepts might make their laborers more docile, less prone to run away, and more cooperative and efficient workers. But slaves turned biblical scriptures to their own purposes forging a theology that often emphasized the theme of liberation. It was easy for them to see, for example, in the figure of Moses a useful model for their own dreams; like the Israelites, they too were ready to cross a River Jordan into a promised land of freedom. The religious services held in the quarters provided slaves with so many positive experiences that, even as they were being exploited, they managed bravely, but perhaps not too surprisingly, to feel that they were free within themselves. In this way slaves began to achieve a degree of liberation well before Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation and the Union soldiers arrived bringing them the news.

I heard them [slaves] get up with a powerful force of spirit, clapping they hands and walking around the place. They'd shout, "I got the glory. I got the old time religion in my heart." I seen some powerful figurations of the spirit in them days. Uncle Billy preached to us and was right good at preaching . . .

-- Mose Hursey, former slave from Red River County, Texas describing a Sunday service in the slave quarters

Adapted from Slave Narratives - [http://www.archives.gov/](http://www.archives.gov/)
"Like a Small Town"

THE PLANTATION LANDSCAPE

The slave houses looked like a small town and there was grist mills for corn, cotton gin, shoe shops, tanning yards, and lots of looms for weaving cloth. Most of the slaves cooked at their own houses that they called shacks. . . . There was a jail on the place for to put slaves in. . .

-- Henry James Trentham, a former slave describing a plantation near Camden, South Carolina

Plantations were complex places. They consisted of fields, pastures, gardens, work spaces, and numerous buildings. They were distinctive signs of southern agriculture and ultimately became prime markers of regional identity. Designed to be vast growing "machines" that produced a single crop for export -- tons of cotton, rice, sugar, or tobacco -- plantations are best understood as cultural landscapes, as human environments inscribed with the competing cultural scripts of their owners and the African Americans who were forced to work there. Successful cultivation of a crop required an array of structures including barns, stables, sheds, storehouses, and different types of production machinery. Sets of quarters for slaves were a prominent feature of any plantation estate. The yard adjacent to the planter's house by itself resembled a small plantation. Here were located a range of different outbuildings including, at the very least: a kitchen, well, dairy, ice house, smokehouse, laundry, and quarters for house servants. It is no wonder then that both enslaved occupants and visitors said that plantations resembled small towns. They did.

Adapted from Slave Narratives - [http://www.archives.gov/](http://www.archives.gov/)

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Background Information

The Underground Railroad was a large, loose network of people who helped escaped slaves (freedom seekers) travel north to freedom during the 1800s. Details of exactly how the Underground Railroad began are not known. Because helping fugitives was illegal, many Underground Railroad activities were kept secret; although in some parts of the north, Underground Railroad activities were openly published in abolitionist newspapers. However, most records of the Underground Railroad come from accounts written after the Civil War. There is some evidence that an organized effort to help slaves to freedom may have begun as early as the late 1700s, although it is likely that those efforts were more localized. The effort grew and became known as the Underground Railroad sometime after the advent of the steam locomotive in the late 1820s, with the term in common usage by the 1840s. It is estimated that anywhere from 25,000 to 100,000 slaves escaped to freedom between 1800 and 1865 with the help of the Underground Railroad.

Contrary to common belief, white abolitionists were not the primary organizers of the Underground Railroad. Though opposed to slavery, many white abolitionists were also opposed to breaking the law and sought to eliminate slavery through legal means. The Underground Railroad was truly an interracial effort, with both whites and blacks helping freedom seekers reach freedom. Help came in many forms, including “conductors” who risked their lives to guide fugitives north, “station masters” who provided supplies, transportation, and sometimes lodging to fugitives, and stakeholders who supported the efforts financially. Though the network was vast, it was comprised of only a small percentage of the northern population.

Adapted from: http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/underground-railroad-journey-freedom-educator-guide/?ar_a=1
Some of the people who played a role in the Underground Railroad are well-known. Frederick Douglass was an escaped slave, whose freedom was later purchased, and a skilled abolitionist speaker. His print shop in Rochester, New York was a station on the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman was also a fugitive slave. Tubman served as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, returning to the south 12-13 times and helping approximately 70 slaves escape to the north. Thomas Garrett was a white Quaker and abolitionist leader who ran a station in Wilmington, Delaware. He is credited with helping nearly 2,700 slaves reach freedom. William Still was a Philadelphia abolitionist and station master who helped hundreds of slaves escape. He kept records of the slaves who passed through his station. He published the records in 1872.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Underground Railroad operated primarily in northern free states. Though there was some Underground Railroad activity in the most northern slave states and along some seaports in the Deep South, the vast majority of escaping slaves had no help from the Underground Railroad in their initial escape nor along their journey through slave states. Instead, they had to create and execute their own escape plans. Because of this, most of the fugitives helped by the Underground Railroad were from slave states that bordered free states, such as Maryland and Virginia. Slaves from the Deep South were rarely able to make use of the Underground Railroad in their escapes because their longer route through slave territory increased their chances of being caught and returned to slavery before they reached free territory.

The Underground Railroad was spurred by the passing of the Fugitive Slave Act as part of the Compromise of 1850. By 1850, tensions between slave and non-slave states were high, and a delicate balance of power existed between the two interests in Congress. As more territories were organized and previously organized territories applied for statehood, that balance of power was threatened. The Compromise of 1850 was a series of bills that, taken together, worked to maintain the balance of power between free and slave states. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was one of those bills, and it replaced an earlier Fugitive Slave Act, enacted in 1793.

Whereas the earlier act was rarely enforced, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 granted great powers to slave hunters and slave owners, even in free states and territories. The Act allowed slave hunters to recapture escaped slaves in any U.S. territory and return them to slavery without a trial and on the sworn word of the alleged owner or his agent.

Adapted from: http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/underground-railroad-journey-freedom-educator-guide/?ar_a=1
It compelled federal marshals to aid in the capture of escaped slaves and offered hefty penalties for failing to capture or assist in the capture of a fugitive. The Act also levied large penalties against anyone providing assistance to a fugitive. Because of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, even escaped slaves who made it to a free state were in danger of being apprehended and returned to slavery. The Underground Railroad played a significant role in helping fugitives make it to Canada, where the act did not apply.

In reality, escaping slavery was very dangerous and most slaves who escaped did so alone and without communicating their intent to others. There was a serious risk that information about any escape plans would get back to slave owners. Any information passed systematically through codes, such as in quilts or songs, could have been intercepted by slave owners or their agents, and the routes they communicated would have been quickly shut down. Instead, general information was more likely passed through word of mouth at places like religious gatherings.

What makes the Underground Railroad such an important piece of history is not necessarily the number of people who escaped slavery along it. In fact, even with the highest estimates, only a very small percentage of slaves escaped north. For example, in 1860, there were almost four million slaves in the South, while at most 100,000 slaves escaped north along the Underground Railroad in the entirety of its existence. The Underground Railroad is significant because it was the first large, organized rebellion against federal law in the United States. In conjunction with the abolitionist movement, it was also the first large, organized interracial effort in the country. As these efforts brought former slaves into closer contact with northern whites, more northerners became aware of the human repercussions of slavery. The stories of former slaves helped fuel northern anti-slavery sentiment.

Adapted from: [http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/underground-railroad-journey-freedom-educator-guide/?ar_a=1](http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/media/underground-railroad-journey-freedom-educator-guide/?ar_a=1)
Vocabulary Connections

3/5 Compromise
36° 30’
Henry Clay
Cotton Gin
The Missouri Compromise
The Quakers
Nat Turner
Emancipation
Abolitionists
William Lloyd Garrison
Frederick Douglass
The Underground Railroad
Harriet Tubman
*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*
Levi Coffin
Sojourner Truth
Wilmot Proviso
Compromise of 1850
Kansas-Nebraska Act
The Republicans
Bleeding Kansas
*Dred Scott v Sanford*
Lincoln-Douglas Debates
John Brown
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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<td><img src="image10.png" alt="Image" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Quilt Pieces**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shoofly</th>
<th>Log Cabin</th>
<th>Wagon Wheel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There might be a friendly guide nearby to help you!</td>
<td>Seek shelter soon and the person here is safe to talk to!</td>
<td>There is a wagon nearby you can get a ride from!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flying Geese</th>
<th>Bear’s Paw</th>
<th>Monkey Wrench</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will give you the correct direction on where to go!</td>
<td>Take a mountain trail and follow the animal tracks to find water and food!</td>
<td>You made need tools ahead to pretend you are someone else!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bowtie</th>
<th>Drunkard’s Path</th>
<th>Crossroads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You will need a disguise or a change of clothes ahead!</td>
<td>Create a zig-zag path; do not follow a straight path</td>
<td>Get to Cleveland, Ohio to find the next route to freedom!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Ozella McDaniel Williams, as reported in “Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad” by Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard. Published by Doubleday in 1999. Softcover edition by First Anchor Books, 2000.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North Star</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow the North Star to reach your next destination!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: What compromise in the U.S. Constitution deals with both slavery and population issues?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: 3/5 Compromise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: What invention allowed more cotton to be cleaned at one time and would lead to the increase in slavery?</th>
<th>Q: What compromise in 1820 barred slavery above a certain line of latitude in the Louisiana Territory?</th>
<th>Q: What religious community in Pennsylvania would often help slaves escape from the South?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Cotton Gin</td>
<td>A: The Missouri Compromise</td>
<td>A: The Quakers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: Who led a 1831 slave uprising in Virginia killing 55 whites?</th>
<th>Q: What term is used to describe the freeing of those in slavery?</th>
<th>Q: What term is described people who wanted to end slavery?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Nat Turner</td>
<td>A: Emancipation</td>
<td>A: Abolitionists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: Who was the abolitionist leader who published the newspaper <em>The Liberator</em>?</td>
<td>Q: Who was a former slave, abolitionist leader, a statesmen and newspaper publisher?</td>
<td>Q: What was the name of the network of routes and safe houses escaping slaves would use in order to get to Canada?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: William Lloyd Garrison</td>
<td>A: Frederick Douglass</td>
<td>A: The Underground Railroad</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: Who was the former slave and “conductor” who went back into the south many times to help over 300 slaves to freedom?</th>
<th>Q: What Harriet Beecher Stowe novel showed slavery in a negative light and angered many slave owners?</th>
<th>Q: What Underground Railroad conductor helped so many slaves escape to freedom that he was known as the “President of the Underground Railroad”?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Harriet Tubman</td>
<td>A: <em>Uncle Tom’s Cabin</em></td>
<td>A: Levi Coffin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q: Who was born as a slave and became the first woman to travel through New England and Midwest speaking out against slavery?</th>
<th>Q: What proviso would have outlawed slavery in any territory gained from Mexico?</th>
<th>Q: What compromise allowed California to enter as a free state, allowed popular sovereignty to decide slavery in the other territories gained from Mexico and had a stricter Fugitive Slave Law?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A: Sojourner Truth</td>
<td>A: Wilmot Proviso</td>
<td>A: Compromise of 1850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answer</td>
<td>Question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: What 1854 Act to bring two states into the Union and decide on the issue by popular sovereignty would eventually bring armed conflict into that region?</td>
<td>A: Kansas-Nebraska Act</td>
<td>Q: What event occurred in 1855 when fighting broke out between people who wanted slavery in a new state and those who did not?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: What political party formed during the 1850s made up of former Whigs that initially joined together to fight against the spread of slavery.</td>
<td>A: The Republicans</td>
<td>A: Bleeding Kansas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q: What Supreme Court case basically stated that slaves are to be considered property and are not entitled to the protection of the Constitution?</td>
<td>A: <em>Dred Scott v Sanford</em></td>
<td>Q: During which debates did Abraham Lincoln state, “A House divided against itself cannot stand.”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A: Lincoln-Douglas Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have been caught by a slave catcher and returned to Station 1!</td>
<td></td>
<td>You have been caught by a slave catcher and returned to Station 1!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are slave catchers nearby and you have to return to the previous station to remain safe!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Station 1

New Orleans, Louisiana

You have decided to leave the life of being a slave and try to make it to freedom by escaping to Canada. Ahead is a dangerous journey of over 1300 miles, crossing rugged terrain and always trying to keep ahead of the slave catchers who will take you back.

For the first part of the journey, you will traveling on a wagon to reach your next destination!

http://www.arthursclipart.org

Station 2

Outside of Mobile, Alabama

The wagon ride ends outside of Mobile, Alabama. Due to the strict fugitive slave laws, wagons are often checked and the chances of being caught are increased!

You have been given instructions to seek out shelter by looking for the Log Cabin symbol. Up ahead you recognize the symbol for shelter and hopefully it belongs to someone on the Underground Railroad!

http://www.wpclipart.com
Station 3

Outside of Montgomery, Alabama

After many days of traveling through the swamps of southern Alabama, you finally made it to the woods and flatter areas of the state. Always keeping off of the main roads, you are able to use the supplies that you were provided to survive enough to make it to the middle of the state.

You have come near other plantations and seen others hard at work and you hope that they can find a way to freedom as well. Along the journey, you find places to rest that were marked by the symbol of the shoofly.

Station 4

Along the Alabama-Georgia Border

Your longer journey through the heart of the south has been difficult but finally you reach the border between Alabama and Georgia. You stop at a safe house marked with the symbol of the monkey wrench.

Inside you are told that a small group of people who are trying to escape are posing as carpenters and blacksmiths. Since you have had some experience in wood working you gather up some tools and prepare yourself for the journey north.
Station 5
Northern Georgia

You are again traveling through dense woods. Your journey has taken you through parts of the Southern Appalachians. Travel has slowed since the terrain has become rougher. You find a safe house and there you see the symbol of the Bear’s Paw letting you know how to get through this perilous journey!

Station 6
Northern Tennessee

Spending more time than you would have liked, you have arrived to the Cumberland Plateau region. It is here that you find out that slave catchers in the area are patrolling rivers and the nearby plateau regions. Knowing that you now have a choice to risk being caught and taking the easier path or going deeper into the Appalachians, you decide to take the mountain trails towards Northern Virginia.

Not sure which way to take, you look at the next symbol and have the Flying Geese point you in the right direction.
Station 7

Northern Virginia

At this station, you see the symbol of the Crossroads which at one time meant that your next large station was Cleveland, Ohio. However, as you were warned by Harriet Tubman, that way is known to too many slave catchers and too dangerous to travel to right now. The best that can be offered is a boat ride up the Ohio River and then travel by wagon to the next stop in Southern Pennsylvania.

Station 8

On the Border Between Maryland and Pennsylvania

Excitement builds as you realize that you are about to leave the South and walk on free soil for the first time in your life. The guide that is waiting at this station warns you to not let your guard down and the trip ahead is still very dangerous. You are warned to take “Drunkard’s Path” by not following the main roads and make sure that you frequently change the direction that you head.
Station 9
New York - Lake Ontario

After many, many months of travel, you have finally made it to Northern New York and you can see Lake Ontario in the distance. You are told to get across the lake, you will need a disguise to fool the patrol on the American side of the lake.

http://etc.usf.edu/clipart

Station 10
Prince Edward Pen Area - Canada

You have made it to Canada! Against the odds your travels have allowed you to reach freedom. There is only one more place to get to before you can begin your new life. You have heard of a settlement near Amherstburg, Ontario that sounds like the best place to settle and live free!

http://etc.usf.edu