



Beyond the River: The Untold Story of the Heroes of the Underground Railroad

Ann Hagedorn

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Beyond the River brings to brilliant life the dramatic story of the forgotten heroes of the Ripley, Ohio, line of the Underground Railroad.

From the highest hill above the town of Ripley, Ohio, you can see five bends in the Ohio River. You can see the hills of northern Kentucky and the rooftops of Ripley's riverfront houses. And you can see what the abolitionist John Rankin saw from his house at the top of that hill, where for nearly forty years he placed a lantern each night to guide fugitive slaves to freedom beyond the river.

In *Beyond the River*, Ann Hagedorn tells the remarkable story of the participants in the Ripley line of the Underground Railroad, bringing to life the struggles of the men and women, black and white, who fought "the war before the war" along the Ohio River. Determined in their cause, Rankin, his family, and his fellow abolitionists—some of them former slaves themselves—risked their lives to guide thousands of runaways safely across the river into the free state of Ohio, even when a sensational trial in Kentucky threatened to expose the Ripley "conductors." Rankin, the leader of the Ripley line and one of the early leaders of the antislavery movement, became nationally renowned after the publication of his *Letters on American Slavery*, a collection of letters he wrote to persuade his brother in Virginia to renounce slavery.

A vivid narrative about memorable people, *Beyond the River* is an inspiring story of courage and heroism that transports us to another era and deepens our understanding of the great social movement known as the Underground Railroad.

Beyond the River: The Untold Story of the Heroes of the Underground Railroad Details

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Leland Seese says

This book opened a chapter of US history that I had not previously read about -- the pre-Civil War struggles to abolish slavery. Being a Presbyterian minister, I was inspired by the courage and steadfast faith among these Presbyterians (and Methodists!).

The book is well-written, in a style that captures the harrowing process of moving men, women, and children from slave-holding states to freedom. Only very rarely does Hagedorn lapse into rather grandiose summary statements seem superfluous to the basic drama of her narrative.

Greg says

Ann is a good friend and this is her best book---about Ripley and the UGRR.

Drick says

This is the true and inspiring story of the people of Ripley, Ohio and environs who served as the first stop out of the South on the Underground Railroad. I visited Ripley, three years ago. It sits on the Ohio River and one can easily see how slaves escaping from Kentucky would find their way to Ripley. What is inspiring is that many of the residents of this town, including free blacks, risked their lives to shepherd hundreds of runaway slaves north to Canada and freedom.

The story centers around John Rankin, a Presbyterian pastor who was preaching about the end of slavery long before the abolitionist movement took off. Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin was said to have been inspired by the story of a young slave woman and child who crossed the Ohio River in the dead of winter. Rankin was a tireless advocate against slavery and involved in 13 children and many townspeople to also participate.

If found this story to be a reminder that sometimes we can not compromise with evil.

Matthew says

Really good personal stories...a saga of the UR.

Amanda says

Wow! One of the best books I have read in a long time. The literary style of writing makes the historical info

not only palatable, but enthralling. I met the author at the Antioch Writers' Workshop, and she is an amazing person. So hardworking, completely dedicated to her work. She moved from NYC to Ripley, Ohio, on the banks of the eponymous river, to research and complete this work. The research is astounding. Just reading her notes and acknowledgements is inspiring and daunting to a would-be author. But beyond the admirable act of writing such a scholarly yet exciting book, the material within speaks for itself. I learned more about Ohio than I ever knew I did not know, if you catch my drift. People were shooting and killing one another in Brown County over slavery well before the Civil War. Black and White men and women cooperated in secret and mortal ways for their common cause. Hagedorn discusses the perils individuals faced in gripping anecdotes, and expands upon the general social tenor through a revelation of laws and larger events in the Abolitionist movement. I was able to connect events and people in this book with other historical info I had only glossed over in other books. It was fascinating to read about Abolitionist figures in some depth, and it made me proud to know that SW Ohio played such a pivotal role in bringing about the end of American slavery, as one Abolitionist accredited the Rev. John Rankin. If you enjoy this book, you will also enjoy John Parker's autobiography, *His Promised Land*.

Vilo says

I thought this book would be a collection of Underground Railroad escapes. Although it did include some details of many escapes (including the famous one that inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe) this is a carefully researched history of the abolitionists in Ohio, especially John Rankin of Ripley, Ohio. It is not an easy, quick read. I found it fascinating to see how the forces against slavery and the forces defending the "peculiar institution" escalated in opposition to each other. I understood better how members of my religion (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or Mormons) could have suffered the things that they did. The forces that felt their way of life and wealth were in imminent danger had become increasingly violent and encouraged others with little stake in the practice to act violently on their behalf. Early in his life as an abolitionist John Rankin predicted that as slavery persisted it was causing dysfunction that would take generations to undo. How correct he was.

Mike says

Amazing book about the underground railroad in Ripley, OH. Highly recommended.

Carolyn says

Well-researched and well-told account of the Underground Railroad that focused on the role of the abolitionists along the Ohio River. As a native of Ohio, I had never before considered my state's importance in the Underground Railroad but Ohio was the state that slaves fleeing the south sought out. If they could make it across the Ohio river, they were in free territory. Of course, they could still be caught by slave catchers and dragged back to slavery so the small towns along the river became the setting where this drama played out and the men and women of these towns became both the villains and the heroes of their time.

This book made me cry, made me angry, and gave me cause to cheer and to hope that goodness does prevail. It is a wonderful and important story and even has implications for the politics of today.

Annie says

This book will always stand as a watershed resource in my education on the history of slavery in the US. It shines more so because it was a gift from my dear cousin Marg, who drove my daughter and I to the Ohio River town of Ripley, which the book is about. We visited the Rankin house on the hill, which was closed but became open to us when Marg, an accomplished landscape architect, began a conversation with the restorers within. They were painting the home with period details. I'm Midwestern bred but ignorant of much of its history. We caught a glimpse of the author, Ann Hagedorn, just inside the wrought iron fence of her historic home on the Ohio River. I wondered why this person smiled at me as I carried her book to our car, it was the author! Very well researched, copious notes and bibliography for further reading. The book focuses on Ohio abolitionist families, white and black, the underground railroad and the wider religious, philosophical and social movement to overthrow slavery in the US.

Maggie says

I read this book for research purposes, but the stories in it are truly amazing. Every resident of Cincinnati should read this!

Tamra says

I love the Underground Railroad. I love the history and the time period.

It was fun getting to "know" Reverend Rankin and his boys (the book is mainly about Rankin and Parker, two of the main Ripley, OH Underground Railroad conductors). I learned some good lessons from Rankin and his life and ideals. I also was very struck by his son, Adam Lowry--so much so that I thought about naming my own son after him. Adam Lowry's "conversion" to an active abolitionist's life is a gripping story. Truly life-changing. It moved me and I have never been able to get the story out of my head. I'm not sure I WANT to get the story out of my head.

I want to read this again, maybe several times.

It was also fun for me to read cause I live in Cincinnati, where some of the stuff went down. We have the Freedom Center here (The Underground Railroad Museum), which I have been to several times, and which acts as a nice compliment to the book. Last summer my husband and I visited Ripley, OH and--in 95 degree weather, 100% humidity-- climbed the horrid, long stairs up to the Rankin house. Made me wonder how in the world women with infants did it in the middle of the night, being chased and fearing for their lives.

Fascinating. I would recommend this book to anyone. I found it easy to read, but have been told by several others that it can get a little tedious at parts--too much history, not enough story. But, being a history lover, I didn't notice.

As a side note: This book tells the real story of Eliza, the fictionalized character in Uncle Tom's Cabin. The story of her escape is gripping and amazing. Because I read the REAL story first, I have not been able to

make myself read the fake story of Eliza in Uncle Tom's Cabin (I have tried twice, and I will try again, probably).

Jerusha Beebe says

This book took a while to ease into given the amount of people, places, and events going on. Once I got going it was captivating. I've been living in Kentucky for the past few years and that made this book hit a bit closer to home - I look at the river differently, I look at the trees differently, I look at our court system differently. This book is a reminder of the irreparable harm caused by the institution of slavery. It is also nice to know the names of several white people who were courageous and took action to stand against it. I highly suggest reading this - especially if you live in Kentucky!

Melissa says

Loved reading! I could the setting, because I'd been there.

Colin says

This book helped me appreciate how horrendous the culture of American slaveholding was, and I thought I knew a lot about the subject. It also helped me to appreciate how hard it was to fight against slavery. If you stand against racism today, you can take inspiration from this book. If you spend time in the Ohio Valley, this is a great companion to its places and the people who were there in the 19th century.

Judy Gerlach says

Very well researched and informative. The network of people secretly working so closely together and risking their lives to keep the Underground Railroad running smoothly is astounding. I have visited the Rankin home and the John Parker home in Ripley and found the book to be a thoroughly enjoyable read.
