



# Rowland T. Robinson, Rokeby, and the Underground Railroad in Vermont

*Rowland Thomas Robinson and Rachel Gilpin Robinson were early converts to Garrisonian abolitionism. Devout Quakers, they believed that slavery was a sin to be opposed by every acceptable means, including aid to fugitive slaves.*

By JANE WILLIAMSON

In 1896, Wilbur H. Siebert wrote to the descendants of Rowland Thomas and Rachel Gilpin Robinson at Rokeby, their home in Ferrisburgh, Vermont. Siebert, an associate professor of history at Ohio State University, sent the survey he used to gather data from aged abolitionists and, more often, from their children, for his book on the underground railroad, published in 1898.<sup>1</sup> Siebert's request was answered by Rowland Evans Robinson, Rowland and Rachel's youngest child, then sixty-three years old. His lengthy reply was clear, thoughtful, and to the point.<sup>2</sup> He had been a child during the 1830s and 1840s, but recalled "seeing four fugitives at a time in my father's house and quite often one or two harboring there." His memory of the four was still vivid, because one "carried the first pistols I ever saw and other [illegible] the first bowie knife." He says nothing of attempted captures or that fugitives were concealed at Rokeby.

In 1935 Siebert contacted the Robinsons again for another book, this time focused on the underground railroad in Vermont.<sup>3</sup> Now a generation later, this request was answered by the abolitionist's grandson and namesake.<sup>4</sup> The two letters have barely a point in common. The second is brief and clearly taken, not from history, but from Rowland E. Robinson's underground railroad stories. R. E. Robinson is known primarily for his books of Vermont folktales, but late in his career he wrote several underground railroad stories in which the compassionate and clever Yankees outsmart the evil slave catchers. His son's description of

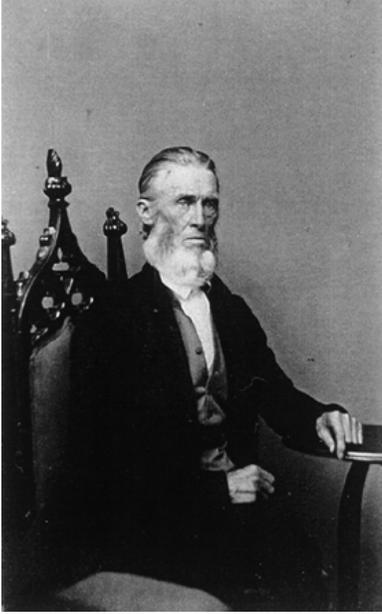
grandfather foiling the slave catcher and the county sheriff, as well as his use of such phrases as “we uns” and “kotchted,” are taken straight from the pages of *Out of Bondage*.<sup>5</sup> Given his family background, it is not surprising that these Robinson stories were taken at face value. Siebert cited them as fact in his Vermont book, stating that R. E. Robinson “had actually heard most of the anecdotes he wrote and published, although he made use of fictitious names for his characters.”<sup>6</sup> Much as he may have wanted to believe this, Siebert cited no evidence of it, and there is none in the collection at Rokeby. More tellingly, Robinson related none of these stories in his 1896 letter to Siebert.

The late nineteenth century saw a flowering of abolitionist reminiscences and tales of the underground railroad capped, in 1898, by Siebert’s book, which remained the standard work for decades.<sup>7</sup> Siebert’s book and his standing as a professor of history elevated the legend and lore of the underground railroad to the status of serious history. This romantic image went unchallenged until 1961, when Larry Gara took the mythology apart piece by piece and exposed the kernels of truth from which it grew. Gara argued convincingly that unlike the well-oiled, efficient, and clandestine railroad of lore, actual aid to fugitives was provided casually if not haphazardly and often delivered quite openly, especially in New England. He contended that North and South joined in aggrandizing the extent and effectiveness of the underground railroad, because it served each of their propaganda needs equally, particularly as the sectional crisis grew after 1850.<sup>8</sup>

But in permanently altering underground railroad historiography, Gara’s book also seems to have brought it to a premature end. Instead of the outpouring of revisionist studies one might have expected, only a few have appeared, and those relatively recently.<sup>9</sup> They have looked at individual fugitives or locales, and despite the narrow focus have revealed much about this perplexing chapter of American history. I believe the future of underground railroad historiography lies in this case study approach, and I offer a Vermont case study here.

Rowland Thomas and Rachel Gilpin Robinson were early converts to Garrisonian abolitionism. Devout Quakers, they believed that slavery was a sin to be opposed by every acceptable means, including aid to fugitive slaves. Their voluminous correspondence contains a rare cache of letters providing specific and detailed information on several fugitives; it forms the basis of our interpretation at Rokeby Museum and will be my focus here.<sup>10</sup>

A particularly rich letter from Oliver Johnson, a Vermonter and most regular and frequent correspondent, who wrote from his various postings as an antislavery agent, was sent in January 1837 from Jenner



*Rowland Thomas Robinson (1796–1879) and Rachel Gilpin Robinson (1799–1862). Carte-de-visite studio photos from the mid-1840s to 1850s. The photo of Rowland is from the Brassart, Johnson & Williams studio, New York City; the photo of Rachel was taken by “Frank F. Currier, Artist,” location unknown. Courtesy of Rokeby Museum.*

Township, Pennsylvania.<sup>11</sup> Located just thirty miles from “the [Mason-Dixon] line,” the area had “at all times no small number of runaway slaves, but they are generally caught unless they proceed farther north.” Johnson wrote to interest Robinson in hiring one of those runaways, Simon, who had been sold to a “soul-driver” and for whose capture a reward had been posted. “When he came here (some time in December) . . . he was destitute of decent clothing, and unable to proceed . . . William C. Griffith, the son of a friend, who has often rendered assistance to runaways, kindly offered to keep him until spring. . . . it is not considered safe for him to remain here after winter has gone by as search will no doubt be made for him.”

Many of these details confirm the conclusions of historians. In their exhaustive book on runaway slaves, John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger state that the most common reason for absconding was

the fear or fact of being sold, and that slaves often timed their escapes carefully.<sup>12</sup> Holidays, when slaves commonly received a few days' rest, gave runaways a modest head start, as absences would go undetected for a day or two. Simon escaped in December—possibly at Christmas time. It is also clear that slaves were commonly recaptured from border regions, frequently without the aid or even the knowledge of local officials. But it seems that Simon also profited from the season of his escape, with the search delayed until spring.

Johnson's letter gave Simon an excellent job reference. "He is 28 years old, and appeared to me to be an honest, likely man. . . . I was so well pleased with his appearance . . . that I could not help thinking he would be a good man for you to hire. Mr. Griffith says that he is very trustworthy, of a kind disposition, and knows how to do almost all kinds of farm work. He is used to teaming, and is very good to manage horses. He says that he could beat any man in the neighborhood where he lived at mowing, cradling, or pitching."

Letters from New York Quakers Charles Marriott<sup>13</sup> and Joseph Beale<sup>14</sup> in 1842 and 1844 contain similar passages. Beale said of fugitive Jeremiah Snowden that "Brother John Nickolson thinks Jeremiah can be very useful to a farmer needing such a man." And Marriott assured Robinson that John Williams was "a good chopper and farmer," and that his wife Martha was "useful and well conducted in the house."

The farm operation at Rokeby was at its height during these years—the so-called "golden age" of Vermont sheep farming—and the Robinsons had quite small families, so the need for hired hands was probably constant. Johnson, Beale, and Marriott were well aware of that need, and no doubt thought of Rokeby as a likely place for fugitives needing work. R. E. Robinson also mentioned work in his 1896 letter to Siebert. He identified the Charlotte, Vermont, farm of his uncle and aunt Nathan and Abigail Hoag as a nearby "station" and said that fugitives "sometimes stayed there for months working on the farm."<sup>15</sup> It is clear from these letters that fugitives were driven by the need for work as much as—or more than—by fear for their safety.

But safety was an issue in these letters, and all three correspondents made it abundantly clear that Vermont was a safe haven for fugitives. Johnson said that Simon had "intended going to Canada in the spring, but says he would prefer to stay in the U.S., if he could be safe. I have no doubt he will be perfectly safe with you." John and Martha Williams had been with Marriott's sister since the fall, as work could easily be found for them, but, Marriott said, "the recent decision of the Supreme Court as to the unconstitutionality of jury trial laws for them has decided us to send them further north either to you or to Canada."

He concluded, "If they could be taken in by thee, we should think them safer."

The case Marriott referred to was *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*. Pennsylvania, like Vermont and many other northern states, had passed a personal liberty law to circumvent the provisions of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793. These state laws required masters or slave catchers to seek warrants before apprehending fugitives, and some guaranteed runaways a jury trial before a certificate of removal could be granted. The *Prigg* decision found Pennsylvania's law, and all others by extension, unconstitutional because it conflicted with a master's right under the federal act.<sup>16</sup> Of course, *Prigg* would have had the same effect on Vermont law as on New York's, so Marriott's desire to move the Williamses probably indicated his belief that recapture would not be attempted in Vermont.

Beale also raised the safety issue in regard to Jeremiah Snowden, but counterposed it directly with work. He said that it would be "safer for him to be in Massachusetts or Vermont *if* [emphasis added] work is to be had for him," and that "we were unwilling to risk his remaining, *although* [emphasis added] we had abundance of work for him at this busy season."

However safe from rendition fugitives in Vermont may, in fact, have been, their own sense of security was certainly another matter. In an 1844 letter,<sup>17</sup> Rachel Robinson described two fugitives who "were afraid to remain any where within our glorious republic lest the chain of servitude should again bind soul and limb. . . . they tarried with [us] only one night & were very anxious to journey on to Victoria's domain." These two were part of a group that had "fled from bondage in a whale-boat, and were pursued by an American vessel of war! Noble work!" Being pursued by a naval warship apparently instilled a fear that even the security of the Robinson home in the "most abolitionist state in the union" could not quell.

The underground rail of legend ran on a track headed straight to Canada. But Johnson and Marriott both questioned the wisdom of sending fugitives across the border. Johnson expressed his fear that in Canada Simon "may fall into bad company; but if he is under your guardianship, he may become a useful man." Marriott was concerned about work, saying that in Canada, "they [fugitives] are too numerous to obtain profitable employment."

The story of the young fugitive Charles Nelson also sheds light on the runaway's need for employment, the safety of Vermont, and Canada as a destination. Chauncy L. Knapp, Vermont's secretary of state and an active abolitionist, wrote to Mason Anthony of Saratoga, New York, in 1838, "to inform you that the lad who is indebted to you and your

father's great kindness for a safe arrival at my friend R. T. Robinson's, is now sitting in my office in the State House."<sup>18</sup> He went on, "By my friend Robinson's earnest request I have assumed the office of guardian to Charles . . . if he should make such proficiency as I have reason to hope, it is my purpose to place him in a good family, ere long, as an apprentice to the art of printing."

An undated clipping of a short article written by Knapp and published in the *Gazette and Standard* and an 1860 letter from Robinson flesh out the full story. Charles was traveling as manservant to his master who was honeymooning in upstate New York. Leery of bringing Charles too near Canada, Campbell, the master, left him in the care of a hotel keeper in Schenectady while he and his bride visited Niagara Falls. Local abolitionists offered to help Charles make his escape, and he was transported that night all the way to Rokeby. After a diligent but fruitless search, Campbell returned home to Vicksburg, Mississippi. Charles apparently lived up to Knapp's hopes, for the article concluded, "Charles continued to reside in Vermont, much beloved by all who knew him. He is now doing a flourishing business, in his line, not far from the forty-fifth degree of north latitude—a practical refutation of the proslavery fallacy that 'the colored man can't take care of himself.'"<sup>19</sup>

Oliver Johnson's January 1837 letter and a second one sent in April<sup>20</sup> provide detailed information on how fugitives traveled and support our general understanding of how they moved from house to house. Johnson said of Simon's trip that "it will be a great way for him to walk, but not worse than going to Canada." He continued, "I gave him such directions as will enable him to reach Philadelphia, where he will put himself under the direction of our friends, who will give him all needful information concerning the route to New York, at which last place he will be befriended by the 'Committee of Vigilance,' or by members of the Ex. Committee. I trust he will meet with no serious difficulty on the way." In a third letter sent in October, he asked whether "the black man [had] arrived yet from Pennsylvania?"<sup>21</sup>

The vigilance committees, organized and operated primarily by free blacks, were established specifically to aid fugitive slaves. The New York Committee was the first, established in 1835; the Philadelphia Committee was not organized until a few months after Johnson wrote this letter. Although both groups were relatively short-lived, they worked together very closely for a time. Records of the Philadelphia Committee for 1839 indicate that from June to December, about a third of the fugitives sent on were forwarded to the New York Committee. With officers, dues, meetings, and sometimes paid agents, these committees were the closest thing to the kind of organization imagined in the legend. They

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all had rather shaky existences, however, and were most effective only briefly after passage of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. Centered in urban areas—Boston, New York, and Philadelphia—they functioned as nodes in a broad web of activity.<sup>22</sup>

Among the most interesting letters in the Robinson correspondence are those between Robinson and Ephram Elliott, a slave owner in Perquimans County, North Carolina. Exchanged in the spring of 1837, they concern the former slave Jesse. Robinson wrote Elliott on Jesse's behalf to negotiate the cost of a freedom paper, "the most anxious wish of his [Jesse's] heart." In his reply,<sup>23</sup> Elliott admitted that Jesse's "situation at this time places it in his power to give me what he thinks proper," but went on to state that he did "not feel disposed to make any title for him for less than Three Hundred Dollars which is not more than one third what I could have had for him before he absconded If I had been disposed to sell him." Robinson wrote to present a counteroffer.<sup>24</sup> "Since leaving thy service he has by his industry and economy laid up 150\$ & he is willing to give the whole of this sum for his freedom . . . If Jesse was in possession of a larger sum he would freely offer it all for his freedom." Robinson also made clear his own unwillingness to contribute, saying "much as I and his other friends here may desire his liberty I am bound to inform thee without the least wish to offend that we cannot consciously contribute any thing towards the purchase of a slave even for his liberation; because we believe it would be recognizing a principle which God forbids." Robinson urged Elliott to accept Jesse's offer, noting that "considering his present circumstances & location," it "must be ackgd [acknowledged] liberal." Elliott conceded that Jesse "at this time is entirely out of my reach," but held firm on his price nevertheless.<sup>25</sup> Holding on to a hope that Jesse would return voluntarily, he said, "I don't know how Jesse could with clear conscience wish me to take any less. . . . If he feels disposed to come back I will meet him at any place that he will mention. And no sum of money or no Temptation shall Separate us."

The Robinson letters provide a wealth of detail that helps us to separate historical fact from fiction. Pursuit is key to the legend of the underground railroad. All the conventions of the popular understanding—the need to operate clandestinely, to communicate in code, to travel at night, and to create hiding places—arise from the assumption of hot pursuit by a determined, ruthless, and often armed slave catcher. While many fugitives were in precisely such danger in the first days and miles of their escapes, it diminished steadily as they put more and more distance between themselves and the slave South. Larry Gara noted that fugitives had already completed the truly perilous parts of their jour-

neys *before* making contact with northern white abolitionists.<sup>26</sup> By the time they reached Vermont, safety was not an issue, as Oliver Johnson, Joseph Beale, and Charles Marriott all made abundantly clear. Even the slave owner Ephram Elliott conceded that Jesse was “entirely out” of his reach. More important, the correspondence with Elliott was *initiated* by Robinson, who, by writing, revealed Jesse’s precise whereabouts—something he certainly would not have done if he thought it would put Jesse at risk.

Were fugitive slaves pursued by slave catchers across the borders of Vermont during the antebellum period? That we are still asking this question in 2001 is testimony to the incredible tenacity and power of the mythological railroad, for I have been unable to find any evidence of slave catchers in the state. Ephram Elliott is only one slave owner, but he clearly considered attempting to recapture a fugitive in Vermont to be out of the question. After searching Vermont’s antislavery and other newspapers for documentation of those incidents passed on in the oral tradition, Ray Zirblis stated flatly in his 1996 report, “There are no substantiated incidents of organized slave catching in the state.”<sup>27</sup> And Joseph Poland, Siebert’s chief informant on Vermont, said in his 1897 reply to Siebert’s questionnaire, “I know of no attempt to recover a fugitive slave from Vermont, save in the celebrated case where Judge Harrington denied the request . . . and a more recent one, in the town of Hartford, which collapsed through the force of public opinion.”<sup>28</sup>

In his 1968 book *The Slavecatchers*, Stanley Campbell noted that it was simply not realistic or economically feasible for slave owners to pursue their property into the far northern states.<sup>29</sup> According to Marion McDougall, it was not just the trip north nor securing permission to seize the fugitive, difficult as both might be, but the trip back south that made the proposition so unlikely. “The risk and trouble of transporting slaves across free states were so great,” she said, that it was rarely even tried.<sup>30</sup> Agreeing with both Campbell and McDougall, Gary Collison went so far as to say that in New England, “slave hunters had to be as cautious and secretive as fugitives.”<sup>31</sup> As for the expense, Franklin and Schweninger make clear that the cost of the slave catcher could easily exceed the value of the fugitive if the search extended too far or too long.<sup>32</sup>

That said, there is one documented case of a slave recaptured on Vermont soil, although it is not a tale in the classic mode of pursuit by a slave catcher. The Hartford incident cited by Joseph Poland was reported in the August 23, 1844, issue of the *Green Mountain Freeman*.<sup>33</sup> Colonel S. T. Bailey of Georgia was visiting relatives in Hartford, Vermont, accompanied by a female slave who was left behind when he

went to Canada. Like Charles Nelson, she took advantage of the opportunity to escape, but instead of moving across state lines, she found shelter in a house “a few miles distant.” On his return, Bailey located his missing slave with the help of Samuel Nutt, a Windsor County justice of the peace, and together they “proceeded to bind their fellow being hand and foot, in open day, in the presence of several females, threw her into a wagon, and the slaveholder drove off with his victim—neither of them have been seen since.” A December issue of the *Green Mountain Freeman*<sup>34</sup> reported that, in fact, Bailey was arrested and tried for kidnapping, but was released for lack of evidence that the woman had been forcibly taken. Thus, contrary to both Vermont’s antislavery reputation and Joseph Poland’s memory fifty years later, local authorities failed to protect the fugitive slave.

In aggrandizing the danger, the legend also socialized it, insisting that northerners who aided fugitives took great risks, and that in breaking the federal law, they exposed themselves to arrest and fine or imprisonment. Attractive as this brave, white abolitionist image may be to some, the tone and content of the Robinson letters certainly belie it. Although there were a few northern martyrs, the vast majority operated openly and with impunity. Levi Coffin and Thomas Garrett, two great Quaker abolitionists, operated unmolested for years in the much more hostile border regions of Cincinnati, Ohio, and Wilmington, Delaware.<sup>35</sup> This aspect of underground railroad mythology is most troublesome, because it takes the spotlight off the true heroes—the fugitives—and shines it instead on their white assistants. It turns runaway slaves from active agents into the passive recipients of white benevolence.

The Robinson letters also shed light on the paths the fugitives took. Influenced by the railroad analogy, the underground railroad has been seen as a series of established stations along which a runaway traveled, in what Zirblis has called the “connect-the-dots approach.”<sup>36</sup> And though there clearly were known friends and helpers along the way, each fugitive probably took a slightly, if not wholly, different route influenced more by his own needs and the family, religious, and friendship ties of his helpers than by prescription. Charles Marriott and Joseph Beale, for example, were both Quakers, and connected to Robinson by strong religious ties. The three were among a vanguard of radical abolitionists constantly agitating the New York Yearly Meeting to action; they supported the boycott of slave-made goods and were cofounders of the New York Association of Friends for the Relief of Those Held in Slavery and the Improvement of the Free People of Color. Johnson was a fellow Vermonter and member of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society. Far from sending the fugitives in their care along a predetermined route,

they all thought of Rokeby as a possible destination because of the match of work experience and need and their complete trust in Robinson. In his 1896 letter to Siebert, R. E. Robinson noted among those to whom fugitives were passed, Joseph Rogers, who was also a Quaker, a neighbor, and a close friend; and Nathan Hoag and Stephen F. Stevens, who were both Quakers and Robinson relatives. Thus it seems more accurate to envision the underground railroad as a web or network of safe homes based on family, religious, and friendship ties rather than as a linear road of anonymous stations.

Underground railroad activity seems to have dropped off at Rokeby after 1850. In 1896, R. E. Robinson could not “remember seeing a [illegible] fugitive here after 1850, though now and then an imposter called on us.”<sup>37</sup> The index to the Robinson letter collection also shows that abolition dropped off sharply as the subject of correspondence after 1850. A number of events in the mid-1840s probably contributed to this decline. A lifelong Garrisonian, Rowland T. Robinson never abandoned the goal of immediate emancipation or his commitment to moral suasion, which meant that he was left out of the majority when activists began to employ political means after 1840. At the 1839 annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, for example, he was the lone member of the Vermont delegation to vote against both the majority and the use of the ballot to further the cause.<sup>38</sup> He and a small group of what one historian described as “pseudo-anarchists” resorted to disrupting meetings of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society as their views became more marginal. Finally, in 1843, the majority resigned in disgust. The Liberty Party began organizing political clubs that same year and eventually usurped the place formerly held by the abolition societies,<sup>39</sup> leaving Robinson without a venue for action. He also lost his base in the Society of Friends. Charles Marriott and several others were disowned in 1842 for their abolitionist activities, which were seen as “calculated to excite discord and disunity among friends.”<sup>40</sup> Robinson survived this incident only to resign his membership a few years later.

Financial troubles at home also preoccupied Robinson, leaving less time and energy for the cause. The price of wool had peaked in 1840, and by 1850 he was in debt and looking for other sources of income. He made a substantial investment in his orchard in 1849, for example. And, like many abolitionists, Robinson turned to spiritualism in the years after 1850, conducting seances in his home, making contact with both his deceased father and son.

Despite these changes, Robinson never abandoned his religious beliefs nor his commitment to full civil rights for African Americans. Immediately after the war, he wrote to the Quartermaster General in Wash-

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ington, D.C., offering shelter and jobs for freedmen.<sup>41</sup> A decade later, he used his position as executor of the estate of Joseph Rogers, a fellow Quaker and abolitionist, to contribute to freedmen's education, and he sought William Lloyd Garrison's advice on which of the several black colleges was most worthy. Garrison replied in July 1878,<sup>42</sup> suggesting Howard, Wilberforce, Hampton, Fiske, and Berea as possibilities. He made a special plea for Berea, which, he said, had "triumphantly solved the problem whether whites and blacks can be amicably and advantageously educated together."

Robinson died the following year.

The story of the underground railroad as we have interpreted it at Rokeby is not always popular. For many people, the romance of the railroad is inextricably tied to the drama and intrigue of danger and secrecy. But taking a close look at the documentary evidence puts the Robinsons' contributions in a new light. Rather than mere shelter for a night, Rowland and Rachel Robinson welcomed former slaves fully and freely into their home, gave them employment on the farm, and provided the space and time needed to start life anew. Fugitive slaves escaped with little more than their own courage and determination; at some point they had to leave their old lives behind them and begin new lives as free men and women. This was the opportunity offered by the Robinsons and Rokeby.

Indeed, reflecting on "days of auld lang syne," William Lloyd Garrison said of Robinson in that 1878 letter, "I always placed you high on my list of friends and co-laborers the most esteemed and the truest; and it affords me the greatest satisfaction to know that you have been preserved to hear the ringing of the jubilee bell, and to witness all those marvelous changes which have taken place in our land within less than a score of years."<sup>43</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1898).

<sup>2</sup> Rowland E. Robinson to Wilbur H. Siebert, 19 August 1896. Siebert Papers, US 5278.36.25\* (Volume 41) Houghton Library, Harvard University.

<sup>3</sup> Wilbur H. Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad Record* (1937; reprint, New York: Negro University Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup> Rowland T. Robinson to Wilbur H. Siebert, 28 October 1935. Siebert Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

<sup>5</sup> Rowland E. Robinson, *Out of Bondage and Other Stories* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle, 1936). These melodramatic stories are distinctly unlike Robinson's several books of Vermont folktales and may well have been written because he realized there was a market for them. It is even possible that Siebert's request for information gave him the idea. Siebert contacted the Robinsons in 1896, and "Out of Bondage" appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1897.

<sup>6</sup> Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery Record*, 75.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example: Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times; Or, Sketches of the Anti-Slavery Movement in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1881); Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Antislavery Conflict* (Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1869); Parker Pillsbury, *Acts of*

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*the Anti-Slavery Apostles* (Concord, New Hampshire, 1883); Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke, 1880); Robert C. Smedley, *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1883); William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (1872; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1968).

<sup>8</sup> Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1961).

<sup>9</sup> See Kathryn Grover, *The Fugitive's Gibraltar: Escaping Slaves and Abolitionism in New Bedford, Massachusetts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Gary Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Stanley Harold, "Freeing the Weems Family: A New Look at the Underground Railroad," *Civil War History* 42 (December 1996): 289–306; David S. Cecelski, "The Shores of Freedom: The Maritime Underground Railroad in North Carolina, 1800–1861," *North Carolina Historical Review* 71 (April 1994): 174–206; Byron D. Fruhling and Robert H. Smith, "Subterranean Hideaways of the Underground Railroad in Ohio: An Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Critique of Local Traditions," *Ohio History* 102 (1993): 98–117.

<sup>10</sup> The Robinson Family Correspondence is housed at the Henry Sheldon Museum of Vermont History in Middlebury, Vermont. Letters are quoted verbatim here, retaining oddities of spelling and usage.

<sup>11</sup> Oliver Johnson to Rowland T. Robinson, 27 January 1837, Jenner Township, Somerset County, Pennsylvania, Robinson Family Correspondence.

<sup>12</sup> John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 231.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Marriott to Rowland T. Robinson, 3 March and 17 March 1842, New York, Robinson Family Correspondence.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph H. Beale to Rowland T. Robinson, 12 July 1844, New York, Robinson Family Correspondence.

<sup>15</sup> Robinson to Siebert, 19 August 1896, Siebert Papers, Harvard.

<sup>16</sup> William M. Wiecek, "Slavery and Abolition Before the United States Supreme Court, 1820–1860," *Journal of American History* 65 (1978): 34–59.

<sup>17</sup> Rachel Robinson to Ann King, 9 January 1844, Ferrisburgh, Vermont, Robinson Family Correspondence. Rachel also described the fugitives' state of mind, saying, "poor men! they left wives behind, and deeply did they appear to feel the separation: they felt it so keenly that one of them said he would not have come away, had he not supposed he could easily effect the escape of his wife also when he was once away. Both seemed very serious, as though grief sat heavy on their hearts."

<sup>18</sup> "Anti-Slavery Action in 1838: A Letter from Vermont's Secretary of State," *Vermont History* 41 (Winter 1973): 7–8.

<sup>19</sup> "Charles Nelson; The Story of a Fugitive from Slavery," *Gazette and Standard*, undated clipping, Archives, Rokeby Museum. Rowland T. Robinson to Ann King, 5 August 1860, Ferrisburgh, Vermont, Robinson Family Correspondence. Robinson's estimate of Charles apparently differed from Knapp's, because he says in the letter, "but he turned out poorly."

<sup>20</sup> Oliver Johnson to Rowland T. Robinson, 3 April 1837, South Weymouth, Massachusetts, Robinson Family Correspondence.

<sup>21</sup> Oliver Johnson to Rowland T. Robinson, 16 October 1837, Woonsocket, Rhode Island, Robinson Family Correspondence.

<sup>22</sup> Gary Collison, "The Boston Vigilance Committee: A Reconsideration," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 12 (June 1984): 104–116; Irving H. Bartlett, "Abolitionists, Fugitives, and Imposters in Boston, 1846–1847," *New England Quarterly* 55 (March 1982): 97–110; Joseph A. Borome, "The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92 (July 1968): 20–351.

<sup>23</sup> Ephram Elliott to Rowland T. Robinson, 19 April 1837, Perquimans County, North Carolina, Robinson Family Correspondence.

<sup>24</sup> Robinson kept a copy of his reply to Elliott; it is written in his hand on the back of Elliott's April letter.

<sup>25</sup> Ephram Elliott to Rowland T. Robinson, 7 June 1837, Perquimans County, North Carolina, Robinson Family Correspondence.

<sup>26</sup> Gara, *Liberty Line*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Raymond P. Zirblis, *Friends of Freedom: The Vermont Underground Railroad Survey* (Montpelier: Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, 1996), 35.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Poland to Wilbur H. Siebert, 7 April 1897, Siebert Papers, US 5278.36.25\* (Volume 41) Houghton Library, Harvard University. The story of Judge Theophilus Harrington's insistence that nothing short of "a bill of sale from God Almighty" would suffice as proof of ownership is one of the best-known stories in the oral tradition and has been so since at least the 1840s. (See Charles M. Storey to Caroline Weston, n.d., Anti-Slavery Collection, Boston Public Library.) Both the quotation

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and the case may be apocryphal, as the decision was not recorded. In any case, it took place in the first decade of the nineteenth century (when slavery was still legal in New York State) and thus is outside of the period under discussion here.

<sup>29</sup> Stanley Campbell, *The Slavecatchers: The Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 185.

<sup>30</sup> Marion Gleason McDougall, *Fugitive Slaves, 1619–1865* (1891; reprint, New York: Bergman Publishers, 1967), 36.

<sup>31</sup> Collison, “The Boston Vigilance Committee,” 107.

<sup>32</sup> Franklin and Schwening, *Runaway Slaves*, 160, 286–289.

<sup>33</sup> “Hold the Miscreant Up, That Freemen May Look at Him!” *Green Mountain Freeman*, 23 August 1844.

<sup>34</sup> “The Georgia Slaveholder and His Catchpole,” *Green Mountain Freeman*, 20 December 1844.

<sup>35</sup> Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin*; James A. McGowan, *Station Master on the Underground Railroad: The Life and Letters of Thomas Garrett* (Maylan, Pennsylvania: Whimsie Press, 1977).

<sup>36</sup> Zirblis, *Friends of Freedom*, 18.

<sup>37</sup> Robinson to Siebert, 19 August 1896, Siebert Papers, Harvard.

<sup>38</sup> David Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791–1850* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 173.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 180–181.

<sup>40</sup> Hugh Barbour, Christopher Densmore, Elizabeth H. Moger, Nancy C. Sorel, Alson D. Van Wagner, and Arthur J. Worrall, eds., *Quaker Crosscurrents: Three Hundred Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meeting* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 186. See also Isaac T. Hopper to Rowland T. Robinson, 29 January 1842, New York, Robinson Family Correspondence.

<sup>41</sup> S. Barker to Rowland T. Robinson, 31 October 1866, Washington, D.C., Robinson Family Correspondence.

<sup>42</sup> William Lloyd Garrison to Rowland T. Robinson, 11 July 1878, Boston, Robinson Family Correspondence.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*