



The Underground Railroad: Selected True Stories of Slave Escapes on the Underground Railroad (Slavery - The Underground Railroad) (Volume 1)

William Still

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The Underground Railroad

True Stories of Slave Escapes on the Underground Railroad

From the Book by William Still

DARING ESCAPES TO FREEDOM

As told by the Slaves themselves

Vol 1

Like millions of my race, my mother and father were born slaves, but were not contented to live and die so. My father purchased himself in early manhood by hard toil. Mother saw no way for herself and children to escape the horrors of bondage but by flight. Bravely, with her four little ones, with firm faith in God and an ardent desire to be free, she forsook the prison-house, and succeeded, through the aid of my father, to reach a free State. Here life had to be begun anew. The old familiar slave names had to be changed, and others, for prudential reasons, had to be found. This was not hard work. However, hardly months had passed ere the keen scent of the slave-hunters had trailed them to where they had fancied themselves secure.

In those days all power was in the hands of the oppressor, and the capture of a slave mother and her children was attended with no great difficulty other than the crushing of freedom in the breast of the victims. Without judge or jury, all were hurried back to wear the yoke again. But back this mother was resolved never to stay. She only wanted another opportunity to again strike for freedom. In a few months after being carried back, with only two of her little ones, she took her heart in her hand and her babes in her arms, and this trial was a success.

TESTIMONY

But few could tell of having been eye-witnesses to outrages more revolting and disgraceful than Washington Somlor. He arrived per steamer Pennsylvania (secreted), directly from Norfolk, Virginia, in 1855. He was thirty-two years of age—a man of medium size and quite intelligent. A merchant by the name of Smith owned Washington.

Eight and a half months before escaping, Washington had been secreted in order to shun both master and auction-block. Smith believed in selling, flogging, cobbing, paddling, and all other kinds of torture, by which he could inflict punishment in order to make the slaves feel his power. He thus tyrannized over about twenty-five head.

Being naturally passionate, when in a brutal mood, he made his slaves suffer unmercifully. Said Washington, "On one occasion, about two months before I was secreted, he had five of the slaves (some of them women) tied across a barrel, lashed with the cow-hide and then clobbered—this was a common practice."

Such treatment was so inhuman and so incredible, that the Committee hesitated at first to give credence to the statement, and only yielded when facts and evidences were given which seemed incontestable.

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