



WILLIAM J. SWITALA

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are credited with having opened an Underground Railroad depot in Lewisburg. At the Bliss house, fugitives were secreted in the carriage house built on the property.<sup>70</sup> Oral tradition cites two other homes in the town as having hidden runaways. The house at 27 South Water Street, built by Robert Irwin in 1791, had a small area under the floor of the kitchen where fugitives were purportedly hidden. Another home, at 17 Market Street, built in 1857 by Jonathan Nesbit, had a crawl space above the bedroom in which runaways hid while passing through the town.<sup>71</sup>

Muncy was an old town founded in 1797 and named after the Munsee Indians.<sup>72</sup> Two black residents of the town, Henry Harris and John Warner, were conductors here. Many runaways stayed at the McCarty-Wertman house in the town itself. Built in 1779, the house had a large cellar in which fugitives hid.<sup>73</sup> Upon leaving Muncy, escapees had two options: head west to Williamsport or go east and to the town of Towanda. In either case, they would have eventually reached New York.

**Muncy to New York via Williamsport**

Williamsport lies about twenty miles to the west of Muncy. The most likely route between the two towns was through the hamlets of Pennsdale and Montoursville, which were situated on the Susquehanna and were a single night's journey apart. Blockson has a route that follows this line of march. He



*The carriage house at the Bliss Home in Lewisburg.* PHOTO BY WILLIAM J. SWITALA JR.



says that Montoursville had a large fugitive slave community that aided runaways. Pennsdale also had an identified station called "The House of Many Stairs." This particular house had a number of false stairways to mislead slave catchers. One of the stairways did lead, however, to a secret room in the attic in which runaways could hide.<sup>74</sup>

The next stopover on this route was Williamsport. The town had a thriving Underground Railroad organization, and many of the runaways who reached it did so by traveling, hidden, in one of the lumber barges operated by Daniel Hughes. He would pick them up in Muncy, or even farther south, and hide them as he made his way up the Susquehanna. After arriving in Williamsport, Hughes or a member of his family would conduct them to the next stop. Another key agent in the town was Robert Faries, superintendent of the Williamsport and Elmira Railroad. Hiding fugitives in baggage cars, he helped hundreds of escaped slaves reach New York on his railroad. Other agents in Williamsport included Joseph M. Grafius, David and Philip Rodrich, Thomas Undegruff, and his son Abraham.<sup>75</sup> Three choices lay open to runaways as they left Williamsport: They could go east to Towanda; head directly to Corning, New York; or go to Olean, New York, via Coudersport, Pennsylvania.

*Williamsport to Towanda.* Runaways could have headed due north from Williamsport on the Tioga Path Indian trail, guided by a member of the Hughes family.<sup>76</sup> About ten miles from Williamsport, the Tioga Path intersected the Sheshquin Path. This trail ran all the way from Trout Run to a point just southwest of Towanda in Bradford County.<sup>77</sup> Because of its proximity to New York and its seclusion in the forested area of the North Branch of the Susquehanna River, Towanda was an ideal jumping-off station from Pennsylvania. The escapees had a short journey from Towanda to either Elmira or Binghamton, New York.

*Williamsport to Corning, New York.* Fugitives leaving Williamsport on the Tioga Path also had another option. They could have stayed on this trail and gone the 50 miles it ran through Tioga County, until they reached the New York state line.<sup>78</sup> Near the border with New York, they received help from the Putnam family, who hid runaways in a secret room.<sup>79</sup> From here the escaped slaves would cross the state line and make their way to the town of Corning.

*Williamsport to Coudersport.* A third possible line of escape was to take the road that followed the trace of the old Indian trail known as the Great Shamokin Path from Williamsport, through Jersey Shore, to Lock Haven. At Lock Haven, fugitives then took the Sinnemahoning Path westward along the

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