a hidden room where the slaves were fed, given medical aid, warm clothing, and allowed to rest and gain strength for the next leg of their journey.

According to the fugitive slave laws of 1793 and 1850 in the United States; it was the duty of every man in the North to attempt to capture an escaped slave and return that person to his or her owner. As a generous reward was offered for the return of the person to bondage there were many "slave-catchers".

The anti-slavery northerners who aided the slaves were unknown to one another for their own protection as well as the run-a-ways. Those caught helping the slaves at the very least faced imprisonment; had their clandestine mission of mercy been discovered by slave-catchers, death was an ever present option.

Nevertheless ardent abolitionists abounded and successfully ran the Underground Railroad, be it in the less dangerous position of "stock-holder", contributing money, cloth-



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ing or food, or the more risky
position of conductor or station
agent.

Many of the station agents would double as conductors, but there were times when the slaves were forced to leave the station at a moments notice and the agent could do little more than give directions, using rocks, trees and stars as a guide for the fugitives to follow to the next station.

Can you imagine running for your life across unfamiliar terrain on a bitterly cold February night, fear causing icy sweat to trickle down your spine as you searched for a safe-house that you could not be certain was there?

The Susquehanna River Valley provided a number of stations. Slaves were often transported by boat to the spot where a conductor (often a Quaker with horse and buggy) waited.

(cont.)

Edna Lynn, Executive Director of the Columbia County Historical Society, tells us of two homes, still standing, in Espy that were used as part of the Underground Railroad.

At one time Mrs. Lynn's uncle resided in the house that had been used as a station. It contained a "crawl space" between the upper and lower floors measuring approximately 3 feet by 3 feet in which the slaves were hidden.

An underground tunnel connected this home to a home on the other side of the street. Mrs. Lynn speculates the fugitives were ushered through the tunnel from one home to the other if slave-catchers were in the area.

To our northwest Pennsdale and Williamsport both had well known stations.

A home in Pennsdale known as the "House of Many Stairs" caused utter frustration to many a slave-catcher. The builder of the home adjusted his plans for the house to the hillside terrain. This resulted

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in an abundance of stairways, seven in all. A slave-catcher could become quite confused by the tangle of stairs wondering if he had already searched a room or not.

The hidden room which actually served as shelter for the slaves had its passage through a small attic door with a sliding panel at the very top of one of the stairways. The home was a stage coach stop and tavern therefore all the activity aided in confusing the slave-catcher.

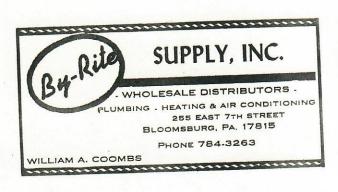
Until a few years ago, when it was destroyed by fire, there was a house in Williamsport known as the "Hughes House". Daniel Hughes, an American Indian chief and his black wife, Anne were the agents and conductors there.

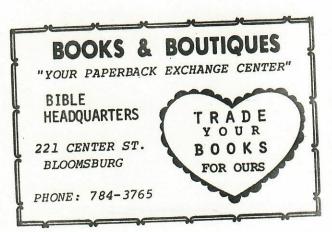
Most often Daniel would pick up the fugitives by canal boat on nights when the moon was obscured by thick layers of clouds to shield them from the eye of the ever present slave-catcher. There were three caves on the Hughes property in which the slaves were hidden.

The route to the property was treacherous due to a rocky, winding path and thick undergrowths of vines and bramble bushes, but the path caused a problem to the hunter as well as the hunted. Often vines

a h; stretched across it throwing fed slave-catcher riders from their norses, giving the slaves time to reach the caves.

Dramas of life and death were played out with frequency by the participants of the Underground Railroad; some 60,000 slaves gained freedom through it, and our Susquehanna Valley played an historic role.







FARM, GARDEN. AND WINDOWS



FEBRUARY'S WORLD OF PLANTS

COFFEE BEANS

Hey, how ya doin? Or wanna cuppa coffee? , are two of our most popular expressions. In the frosty month of February, the latter is probably more popular than the former.

Coffee was first consumed in the dark ages of Ethiopia. Consumed is the right word because these early people "ate" their coffee. And why not? Raw coffee contains about 12% protein. It was an edible for centuries in Africa but when someone discovered how to roast, grind and brew the coffee seeds, a world beverage was born.

Coffee reached England in time for Captain John Smith to bring it to the new world where today - if you are an average American - you drink between three and four cups

"Moca" is a nickname for just plain coffee. Moca, a coastal city in Arabia, was a big export center for this crop in the early days.

"Java", another nickname, was acquired when some early Dutchman stole some coffee seed from Moca and planted them on the Indonesian Island of Java where they prospered.

The coffee bean is not a bean at Scientists call it a drupe. Cherries, peaches and plums are also drupes; a large seed covered by a pulpy mass inside the skin.

This pulp must be removed by the coffee grower before we see it as a grindable "bean".

And finally, why is coffee so expensive? Several reasons: first, hand-picking is necessary. The beans do not ripen all at once.