

Canadian Anti-Slave Group

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Act is shown by the fact that every fresh arrest would cause a panic in its neighborhood. At Chicago in 1861, almost on the eve of the Civil War, more than 100 Negroes left on a single train following the arrest of a fugitive, taking nothing with them but the clothes on their backs and most of them leaving good situations behind.

The underground railroad system was never as active in all its history as after 1850. Despite the law, and the infamous activities of many of the slave-catchers, at least 3,000 fugitives got through to Canada within three months after the bill was signed. This was the estimate of both Henry Bibb and Hiram Wilson and there were probably no men in Canada who were better acquainted with the situation. In the *Voice of the Fugitive* of November 5, 1851, Bibb reported that "the road is doing better business this fall than usual. The Fugitive Slave Law has given it more vitality, more activity, more passengers and more opposition which invariably accelerates business We can run a lot of slaves through from almost any of the bordering slave states into Canada within 48 hours and we defy the slaveholders and their abettors to beat that if they can. . . . We have just received a fresh lot today and still there is room. The Troy (N. Y.) *Argus* learned from "official sources" in 1899 that the underground had been doing an unusually large business that year. Bibb's newspaper reports, December 2, 1852, that the underground is working well. "Slaveholders are frequently seen and heard, howling on their track up to the Detroit River's edge but dare not venture over lest the British lion should lay his paw upon their guilty heads." Bibb kept a watchful eye on slave-catchers coming to the Canadian border and occasionally reported their presence in his paper. Underground activity was also noted in the *Liberator*. "The underground railroad, and especially the express train, is doing a good business just now. We have good and competent conductors," was a statement in the issue of October 29, 1852.

Not all those who fled to Canada left their property behind. The *Voice of the Fugitive* makes frequent reference to Negroes arriving with plenty of means to take care of themselves. "Men of capital with good property, some of whom are worth thousands, are settling among us from the northern states," says the issue of October 22, 1851, while in the issue of July 1, 1852, it is noted that "22 from Indiana passed through to Amherstburg, with four fine covered waggons and eight horses. A few weeks ago six or eight such teams came from the same state into Canada. The Fugitive Slave Law is driving out brains and money." In a later issue it was stated, "we know of several families of free people of color who have moved here from the northern states this summer who have brought with

them property to the amount of \$30,000." Some of these people with property joined the Elgin Association settlement at Buxton, purchasing farms and taking advantage of the opportunities that were provided there for education. A letter to *The Voice of the Fugitive* from Ezekiel C. Cooper, recently arrived at Buxton, says: "Canada is the place where we have our rights." He speaks of having purchased 50 acres of land and praises the school and its teacher at Buxton. Cooper came from Northampton, Mass., driven out by the Fugitive Slave Law. A rather unusual case was that of 12 manumitted slaves who were brought to Canada from the south. They had been bequeathed \$1,000 each by their former owner. They all bought homes in the Niagara district.

While fugitives and free Negroes were being harried in the northern states, slaves continued to run away from their masters and seek liberty. "Slaves are making this a great season for running off to Pennsylvania," said the Cumberland, Va., *Unionist* in 1851. A large number have gone in the last week, most of whom were not recaptured." At the beginning of 1851 *The Liberator* had a Buffalo despatch to the effect that 87 runaways from the south had passed through to Canada since the passing of the bill the previous September. Bibb mentions two runaways from North Carolina who were 101 days reaching Canada. The *Detroit Free Press* reported that 29 runaways crossed to Canada about the end of March, 1859, "the first installment of northern emigration from North Carolina." About the same time the *Detroit Advertiser* announced that "70 fugitive slaves arrived in Canada by one train from the interior of Tennessee. A week before a company of 12 arrived. At nearly the same time a party of seven and another of five were safely landed on the free soil of Canada, making 94 in all. The underground railroad was never before doing so flourishing a business." The New Orleans *Commercial Bulletin* of December 19, 1860, claimed that 1,500 slaves had escaped annually for the last fifty years, a loss to the south of at least \$40,000,000. The American Anti-Slavery Society's 27th report said Northward migration from slave land during the last year has fully equalled the average of former years."

It is interesting to note that several of the most famous cases that arose under the Fugitive Slave Act had their ending in Canada. Shadrack, Anthony Burns, Jerry McHenry, the Parker's, the Lemmon slaves and others found refuge across the border after experiencing the terrors of the Fugitive Slave legislation. The Shadrack incident was one of the earliest to arise under the new law. Shadrack, a colored employe in a Boston coffee house, was arrested on February 15, 1851, on the charge of having escaped from slavery in the previous May. As the commissioner before whom he was brought was not ready to proceed the case was adjourned for three days. As Massachusetts had forbidden the use of her jails in fugitive cases, Shadrack was detained in the U. S. court room at the court house.

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