

Underground Railroad 1831-1861

Berlin was a stop on the Underground Railroad – particularly between New Haven and Farmington

Milo Hotchkiss was a well known temperance and abolitionist. As early as 1838 he was a delegate to the State Anti-Slavery Society meeting. In the Ohio Historical Society, Manuscript collection, Wilbur Siebert wrote that Milo Hotchkiss was the Underground rail road agent in Kensington.



Women were involved in the anti-slaving movement. There was a “**Worthington Female Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle**” in Berlin. (CT Historical Society Manuscript Collection # 66122) (no date)

Amistad - On March 18, 1841, In a Currier and Ives moment: with snow blanketing the state, the Africans came by train from Westville in New Haven to the Berlin railroad station. Norris Wilcox had arranged for the train. A dozen sleighs brought 30 of them overland to Farmington. The remaining 8 came the next day with Lewis Tappan. Mr. William Bulkeley remembers as a child going to the old depot to see the Africans.



379 Main Street, East Berlin is suppose to be another Underground Railroad station.

The Underground Railroad, a vast network of people who helped fugitive slaves escape to the North and to Canada, was not run by any single organization or person. Rather, it consisted of many individuals -- many whites but predominantly black -- who knew only of the local efforts to aid fugitives and not of the overall operation. Still, it effectively moved hundreds of slaves northward each year -- according to one estimate, the South lost 100,000 slaves between 1810 and 1850.

An organized system to assist runaway slaves seems to have begun towards the end of the 18th century. **In 1786 George Washington complained** about how one of his runaway slaves was helped by a "society of Quakers, formed for such purposes." The system grew, and around 1831 it was dubbed "The Underground Railroad," after the then emerging steam railroads. The system even used terms used in railroading: the homes and businesses where fugitives would rest and eat were called "stations" and "depots" and were run by "stationmasters," those who contributed money or goods were "stockholders," and the "conductor" was responsible for moving fugitives from one station to the next.

For the slave, running away to the North was anything but easy. The first step was to escape from the slaveholder. For many slaves, this meant relying on his or her own resources. Sometimes a "conductor," posing as a slave, would enter a plantation and then guide the runaways northward. The fugitives would move at night. They would generally travel between 10 and 20 miles to the next station, where they would rest and eat, hiding in barns and other out-of-the-way places. While they waited, a message would be sent to the next station to alert its stationmaster.

From PBS Africans in America

Ruth Douglas – January 2002 – 1185 Farmington Ave, West Hartford, CT 06107

The Underground Railroad in the Kensington area of Berlin, CT

In the Charter Oak newspaper of March 1838 Milo Hotchkiss was listed as a delegate to the Feb. 28, 1838 State Anti-Slavery Society meeting. It was held in Hartford and was composed of individuals friendly to the immediate emancipation of the slaves of our country. Many of these delegates became agents or station masters for the Underground Rail road.

Milo Hotchkiss was born 10 Oct. 1802 in Homer, Cortland County, NY. He died 12 Oct. 1874 in Kensington, CT. He married Rhoda Barrett of Kensington 22 Jan 1826 and moved to Berlin in 1831. He was active in temperance and abolition movements. He built their home on Main Street in Kensington in 1855. The house is now the Landon house 289/291 Main Street (CT Historical Commission Dec. 1984)

An 1860 map of Kensington, available at the CT Historical Society in Hartford shows two buildings belonging to M. Hotchkiss, the one on Main St and a smaller outbuilding on Grove Hill Road.

On the 1860 census there was a Samuel J. May listed as an employee of Milo Hotchkiss,. He was not the Reverend Samuel J. May who in 1831 supported Prudence Crandall in Brooklyn, CT. He was however a descendant of the same John May of Roxbury as was the Rev. Samuel J. May. (Descendants of John May of Roxbury,. MA 1640, published by Gateway Press, Baltimore, 1978.)

The Milo Hotchkiss home is mentioned in the Genealogy and Ecclestial History of Alfred Andrews published Chicago, Ill, 1867. "This Serg. John Norton lived by the well at the southwest corner of Milo Hotchkiss' house lot, the old house still well remembered by the oldest living. It was on the corner of the main road from Farmington to Middletown, and is said on the record to be opposite the foot crossing on Mill River."

In the Ohio Historical Society, Manuscript coll. 116, Wilbur Siebert coll. Box 70, Siebert wrote that Milo Hotchkiss was the Underground rail road agent in Kensington.

According to the Horatio T. Strother book – The Underground Railroad in Connecticut, published in 1962 by Wesleyan Press, Middletown, CT. A minister in Meriden, Rev. George W. Perkins often hid fugitives in his barn or attic. He probably then took them to the Milo Hotchkiss way station in Kensington. From there they would get taken to the Stanley Quarter in New Britain and then on to Farmington.

Women were also active in the Anti-Slavery movement. There was a "Worthington Female Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle" in Kensington. (CT Historical Society Manuscript Collection # 66122)

This is the information I have found on Berlin. The house in Kensington was the last house I was looking for in Hartford and Litchfield counties. It has taken almost two years to gather information on these two counties. I now have information on all eight CT counties but not yet pictures of all the houses. Some of the houses are gone, but it is amazing how many are still standing 150 years later.