

Path to Freedom Tour



During the Civil War era, the “Underground Railroad” was a loosely-knit network of support for African American freedom seekers from Southern states. Oswego County was the last stop before attaining freedom across Lake Ontario into Canada.

Oswego County residents became involved in the fight to end slavery in the years before the Civil War. Some provided assistance to African-American slaves by hiding them in their homes or helping them find transportation to Canada. During your tour, you’ll hear unique stories that are a significant part of local and national history.

Dr. George Franklin Grant was born in Oswego in 1846 and invented the golf tee. Grant received a patent for the golf tee in 1899; the blueprint for today’s wooden and plastic tees. He is a descendant of Tudor E. Grant, who escaped slavery to settle in Oswego in the 1830’s. He continued to live in Oswego until the 1860’s, working as a barber and a silk dryer.

You’ll have the opportunity to hear the story of the Grant family and Underground Railroad activities in Oswego when you visit the Oswego County Historical Society located at the Richardson-Bates House Museum.

You’ll have lunch in the building where Tudor E. Grant and former slave Charles Smith operated barbershops in the basement. Now the building

Following lunch, you’ll travel to Bristol Hill Church in Volney. During your journey, a step-on guide will point out some of the 34 documented Underground Railroad sites in Oswego County. At Bristol Hill Church, a presentation will bring to life the hardships of the freedom seekers, as actors will read from letters written by slaves. During the 1840’s, the church was proud to have both African-American and white members, many of whom were active in the anti-slavery movement.

Another option of this tour can include:

At Arena’s Eis House in Mexico, there’ll be a special presentation on Underground Railroad sites followed by dinner. In Mexico, Orson Ames sheltered famous fugitive William “Jerry” Henry for one night in October 1851. By rescuing Henry in the famed “Jerry Rescue” in Syracuse, abolitionists successfully challenged the ability of the federal government to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and helped make Central New York a national center for the anti-slavery movement. Noted lecturer Asa Wing, who promoted equal rights based on a biblical belief in equality, also resided in Mexico. Following dinner, you will compete for prizes in a special “Jeopardy” themed game, testing your knowledge of the Underground Railroad in Oswego County.