

# NEWSLETTER – METAMORA ASSOCIATION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

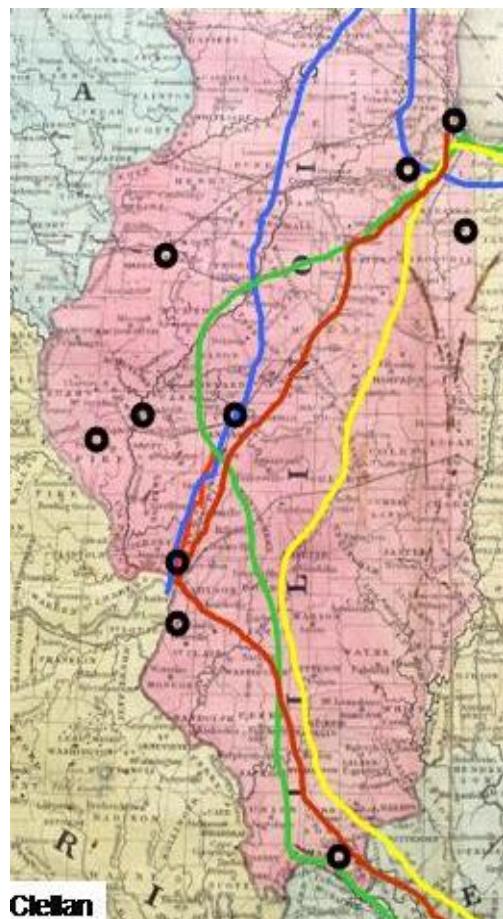
FEBRUARY 2015

One of our favorite Newsletter subscribers suggested a Newsletter article about Metamora's participation in the Underground Railroad (UGRR). With the upcoming 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Civil War, Lincoln's birthday, and Metamora's extensive involvement in the UGRR, we thought that would be an excellent, interesting, and timely article. Two of our reader's great-great grandfathers played a significant role. In fact, one was arrested for harboring a slave and was defended by an 8<sup>th</sup> Circuit lawyer who you have probably heard quite a bit about. The "conductors" were exceptionally courageous and faced severe financial penalties and jail time if convicted for harboring a slave and violating the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Adding further risk, a fairly significant portion of central Illinois residents who had migrated here from southern states were sympathetic to the Southern cause. Because of the secrecy needed by the UGRR conductors, not a lot of written documentation was recorded, which led to sometimes conflicting accounts of its history.

A huge THANKS to Linda Moore who contributed much of the background about her two great-great grandfathers – George Kern and "Deacon" Norman Dutton.

We hope you will enjoy learning more about how the UGRR operated in Metamora and Woodford County. In the grand scheme of history, it was not that long ago. And, as always, if you have any additional information or questions, please don't hesitate to get in touch! 

**Some Background...** By the end of the 1840s, Woodford County had begun to be well settled by Anglo immigrants, with the county's population topping the 5,000 mark. Those settling the state from the East were generally opposed to the institution of slavery and with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, popular discontent grew and opponents began to engage in acts of resistance, hiding escaped slaves seeking liberation in Canada. Five or six branches passed through Illinois, with one branch of the so-called Underground Railroad running directly through Woodford County. The Underground Railroad beginnings can be traced to settlements of transplanted New Englanders. Opposition to the Abolitionists came primarily from settlers from the South, mainly Kentucky.



The "stations" were generally residences where escaping slaves could eat and sleep out of sight of their pursuers. These stations were located at convenient distances so that those escaping (and their "conductor" guides) could travel from one to the next in a single night.

The journey was dangerous. Wanted posters offering rewards of \$50, \$100, and sometimes more for specific runaway slaves were placed by slave-owners, attracting bounty hunters to a quest. Moreover, those assisting escaping slaves were themselves violators of the Fugitive Slave Law, subject to prosecution and punishment.

The Fugitive Slave Law or Fugitive Slave Act was passed by the United States Congress on September 18, 1850, as part of the Compromise of 1850 between Southern slave-holding interests and Northern Free-Soilers. However, instead of discouraging the disposition, on the part of the opponents of slavery, to aid fugitives in their efforts to reach a region where they would be secure in their freedom, the effect of the Law was the very opposite of that intended by its authors - unless, indeed, they meant to make matters worse. The provisions of the act seemed, to many people, so unfair, so one-sided, that they rebelled in spirit and refused to be wade parties to its enforcement. The law aroused the anti-slavery sentiment of the North, and stimulated the active friends of the fugitives to take greater risks in their behalf. New efforts on the part of the slaveholders were met by a determination to evade, hinder and nullify the law.

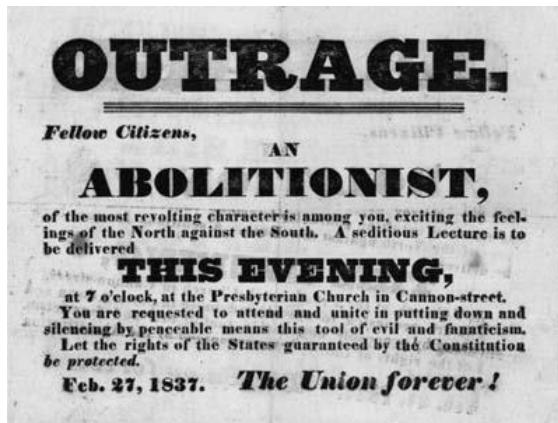
The Fugitive Slave Act was one of the most controversial elements of the 1850 compromise and heightened Northern fears of a "slave power conspiracy." It required that all escaped slaves were, upon capture, to be



returned to their masters and required that officials and citizens of Free states had to cooperate in this law. Abolitionists nicknamed it the "Bloodhound Law" for the dogs that were used to track down runaway slaves.

The period of greatest activity of the system in this State was between 1840 and 1861 - the latter being the year when the pro-slavery party in the South, by their attempt forcibly to dissolve the Union, took the business out of the hands of the secret agents of the "Underground Railroad," and-in a certain sense - placed it in the hands of the Union armies.

It was in 1841 that Abraham Lincoln - then a conservative opponent of the extension of slavery on an appeal from a judgment, rendered by the Circuit Court in Tazewell County, in favor of the holder of a note given for the service of the indentured slave-girl "Nance," obtained a decision from the Supreme Court of Illinois upholding the doctrine that the girl was free under the Ordinance of 1787 and the State Constitution, and that the note, given to the person who claimed to be her owner, was void. And it is a somewhat curious coincidence that the same Abraham Lincoln, as President of the United States, in the second year of the War of the Rebellion, issued the Proclamation of Emancipation which finally resulted in striking the shackles from the limbs of every slave in the Union.



Illinois also had its own stringent fugitive slave laws with fines up to \$100. In addition, a runaway slave could be subject to as many as 35 lashes on a bare back for being more than 10 miles from his master's tenement.

Not everyone was in favor of abolition. In one incident, a meeting in Washington of Abolitionists led by Owen Lovejoy was stopped by pro-slavery men before it got started. The men, among whom were the Methodist Episcopal minister and a doctor, attacked the group with a shower of rotten eggs, stones, bricks, arms, etc. – driving them to the creek on South Main, and forcibly took possession of the school house building to prevent the meeting.

According to account of this episode by Emma Julia Scott, a daughter of J. Randolph Scott, "a prominent man of conservative views on the slavery questions advised the Anti-Slavery men not to hold the

meeting as they were determined to do, as the mob, he said, was frenzied with liquor and he feared the consequences. So they moved the meeting to Groveland. The mob was determined to follow and break up that meeting, but was deterred by being told that as the Anti-Slavery men were on their own grounds they would fight and doubtless blood shed would follow.

### From the 1910 Woodford County History by Roy Moore...

"...There was bitter opposition to the enforcement of the fugitive slave law. This condition was not surprising, since the county had men, who were strong opponents of slavery and likewise men who would make any sacrifice to have the institution stamped out. Over this branch of the underground road many a run-away slave passed on his way to freedom. There was such a strong sentiment against the [slave] traffic that conductors and stations were found in sufficient number to carry on the work successfully.

"Church deacons named Mr. Norman Dutton and Parker Morse – both originally from Vermont - were credited by Moore as leaders of the local anti-slavery effort. Despite the fact that these and other active conductors in the underground railroad were known to the community, popular sentiment against slavery was such that there was "very little molestation for a long time" in Woodford County. Only one instance of an arrest of a Woodford County conductor is recorded by Roy Moore in his 1910 history, and that ultimately resulted in the quashing of the indictment. (See George Kern section below.)

**\$150 REWARD.**  
RANAWAY from the subscriber, on the night of Monday the 11th July, a negro man named

**TOM,**

about 30 years of age, 5 feet 6 or 7 inches high; of dark color; heavy in the chest; several of his jaw teeth out; and upon his body are several old marks of the whip, one of them straight down the back. He took with him a quantity of clothing, and several bats.

A reward of \$150 will be paid for his apprehension and security, if taken out of the State of Kentucky; \$100 if taken in any county bordering on the Ohio river; \$50 if taken in any of the interior counties except Fayette; or \$20 if taken in the latter county.

B. L. BOSTON.

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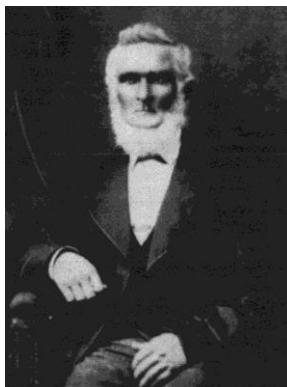
B. L. BOSTON.</

## Metamora Had Several “Conductors...”

“**Deacon Joel Ranney** came to Metamora Township in 1838 from Stockbridge, Vermont, making the journey across the country in a wagon drawn by two horses. He bought a tract of prairie land in what is now Metamora Township.

“In 1848 his death occurred. Two children remained, Hon. J. A. Ranney and a daughter, Esther J. Packard. The former is still (written in 1910) a prominent character in Metamora Township. He was deeply interested in the solution of the slavery question and on one occasion was conductor on the Underground Railroad; he became prominent in the Republican Party and in 1876 was elected as a member of the legislature and served in the general assemblies of 1877 and '79.”

### Deacon Norman Dutton



**Deacon Norman Dutton**  
**1810-89**

#### A great-great grandfather of Linda Kern Moore and Bob Kern

Fugitives came into Woodford County from what was then called Deacon Street, between Tremont and Morton. They passed around Washington, which was regarded as unfriendly toward plans for their escape, and came to the place of Deacon Norman Dutton. Deacon Dutton, born in Vermont, himself was the principal conductor from that station, and George Kern also acted in that capacity. Patterson Scott was one of the conductors southeast of Washington. Mr. Dutton usually brought “the freight” to what was called Morsetown. This was a settlement of the Morse family and was south of Cazenovia, near the Morsetown Cemetery (currently the property of the Voelkers). Mr. Dutton’s home was a brick home that had a hole in the basement wall that was camouflaged to appear as a solid wall.

Mr. Dutton, from Vermont, served as a Deacon in the Congregational Church for over 40 years. The Congregational Church’s roots can be traced to the New England Puritans.

**Captain Parker Morse and - Joseph T. Morse** - were in hearty sympathy with all efforts made for the escape of slaves. From there the fugitives were taken to a point beyond Magnolia, to the home of a Quaker named Lewis, or if there happened to be “no excitement,” they were taken to the home of a man named Werk (or Work), near Crow creek, this side of Lacon. This route ran from Sparta, Reno, Springfield, Delavan, Dillon, Elm Grove, Tremont, Deacon Street, Washington, Metamora, Cazenovia, Lowpoint, Crow Creek, Magnolia, Work’s Ford, Granville, to Chicago, where it became easier to board a boat and reach freedom in Canada, where Queen Victoria decreed that they became a British citizen as soon as they reached Canadian soil.

### Lincoln Defends George Kern...

#### Another great-great grandfather of Linda Kern Moore and Bob Kern

George’s sons – John, George, and Andrew – helped their father with his “work”

Andrew’s son Robert was the father of Scoville Kern, father of Bob Kern and Linda (Kern) Moore, who contributed a great deal of invaluable background for this article.

Andrew Cress of Washington had George Kern and J. Randolph Scott arrested. Their case was tried in the April term of the circuit court in 1847, at Tremont, then county seat of Tazewell County. They were indicted by the grand jury of harboring slaves. There was no proof found that the negro was a slave and their case was dismissed. Abraham Lincoln, then a rising young lawyer, defended them.

“Lincoln defended three men charged with harboring fugitive slaves. State’s Attorney David Campbell brought all three prosecutions in 1845. The defendants in People v. Kern in Tazewell County on a change of venue from Woodford and People v. Pond in Menard County were found not guilty. In the third, People v. Scott, defended by Lincoln in Tazewell County, Campbell dropped the charges. These are the last known cases on harboring slaves in which Lincoln was involved.”

From Lincoln Day by Day and Guy Fraker’s *Lincoln’s Ladder to the Presidency – the*

*Eighth Judicial Circuit: “April 15, 1847. Woodford County Circuit Court begins its session. George Kerr (sic), Sr. and J. Randolph Scott, indicted for aiding fugitive slave , win dismissal for charge when Lincoln argues lack of proof that Negro in case was slave. Ibid.”*

**CAUTION!!**  
**COLORED PEOPLE**  
**OF BOSTON, ONE & ALL,**  
You are hereby respectfully CAUTIONED and  
advised, to avoid conversing with the  
**Watchmen and Police Officers**  
**of Boston,**  
For since the recent ORDER OF THE MAYOR &  
ALDERMEN, they are empowered to act as  
**KIDNAPPERS**  
**AND**  
**Slave Catchers,**  
And they have already been actually employed in  
KIDNAPPING, CAPTURING, AND KEEPING  
SLAVES, themselves. If you value your LIBERTY,  
and the Welfare of the Fugitives among you, Show  
them in every possible manner, as so many HOUNDS  
on the track of the most unfortunate of your race.  
Keep a Sharp Look Out for  
**KIDNAPPERS, and have**  
**TOP EYE open.**  
APRIL 24, 1851.

The fine for harboring a slave was severe - up to \$1,000, 6 months' imprisonment, and civil damages of up to \$1,000 per slave.

**More on George Kern.** In one incident, a Morton conductor drove his wagon with a load of black escapees through Washington on election day. Knowing that citizens would be gathered on the main street for the election, he covered his "freight" with a buffalo robe and grain and delivered the slaves to George Kern. Mr. Kern continued the journey by delivering the load in an open buggy to William Lewis, a Quaker who lived at Clear Creek, a Quaker settlement, beyond Magnolia. Other "freight" was taken to the Werk home.

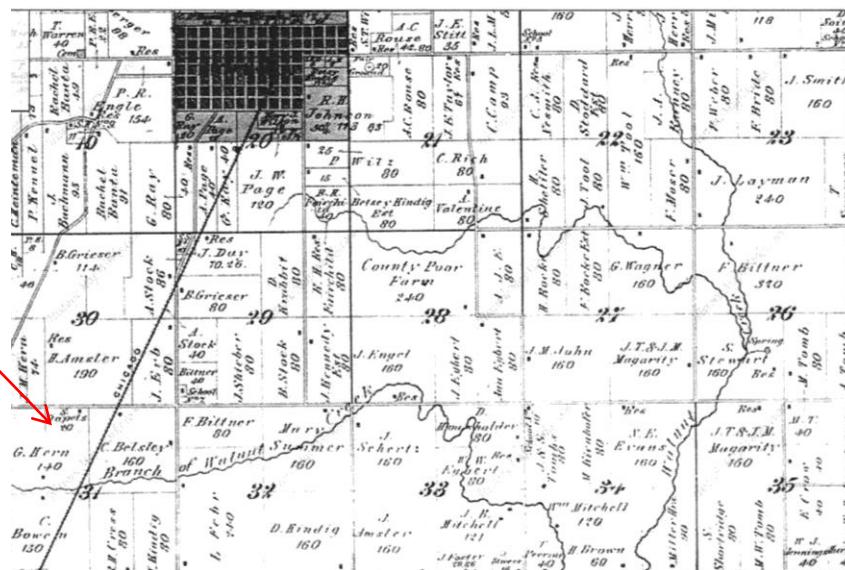
John Kern, a son of George, was reported to have been offered a large sum of money by Robert Castle, Sr. of Metamora if he would bring him certain slaves with a large reward when they arrived at the elder Kern's residence. The young Kern made sure this did not happen.

When slaves arrived, he put them in a wagon and covered them with grain sacks filled with straw, tied on the wagon to appear as a load of grain being carried here from the Chicago market. They were delivered to another depot in Magnolia.

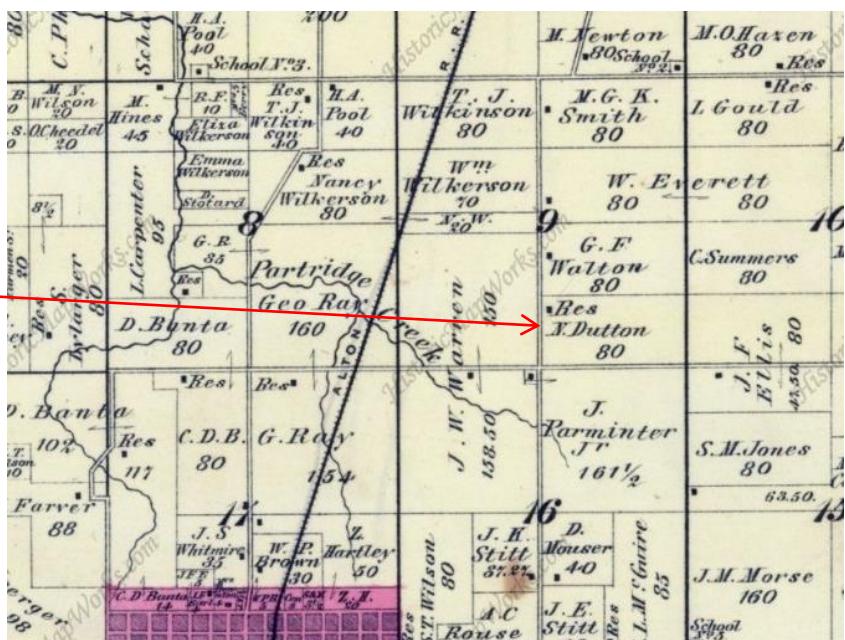
Slave hunters were not only known to seek fugitives, but they would steal slaves if given an opportunity. A large slave market was located in St. Louis and the hunters could often get more by reselling the slave than turning them in for the reward.

### Where Mr. Dutton and Mr. Kern Lived... (From the 1873 Plat Book)

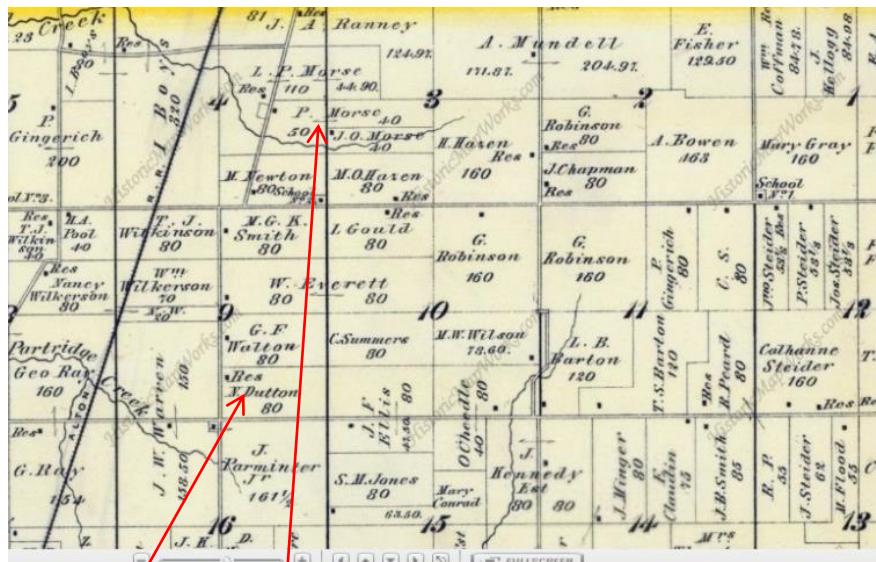
Mr. Kern lived southwest of Metamora east of the Washington Road.



Mr. Dutton lived north of Metamora just south of the Morses



**The Morse Family...** No account of the history of Metamora would be without a sketch of the Morse family, which was so prominently connected with the work of the Underground Railroad.



The Morses lived on what was the State Route south of Cazenovia.

here, and they were active in the work of the Underground Railroad. Miss Love K. Morse is said to have taught the first free school in the county. In 1910, only one remained of all those connected with its work, J. A. Ranney (note: this was written in 1910), and he is able to tell many interesting incidents in connection with it.

Deacon Parker Morse was an important character in this work of escape. North of Low Point, - James G. Bayne, and the family of John McCoy, took an active part in aiding slaves, James Piper, east of Low Point, was also a strong sympathizer with those seeking liberty. J. A. Ranney, who still (in 1910) resides south of Cazenovia, once acted as a conductor on this road, and has a vivid recollection of some of his experiences on that trip. Although he was quite young at the time, they reached the home of Lewis, three miles beyond Magnolia, with his party about three o'clock in the morning. The family was aroused and Mr. Ranney still remembers the welcome sight of the room into which they were ushered on their arrival. He styles it the best looking room he ever saw.



The Parker Morse house north of Metamora and just south of Cazenovia on the old state route to Chicago was a station on the UGRR. Slaves were concealed in a hollowed-out place next to the basement. The house was sold to the Voelker family in 1895. It has now been demolished.

prevent discovery. All aid granted to these fleeing slaves was a violation of the Fugitive Slave Law, yet in spite of this the work went on with very little molestation for a long time in this county. The efforts of the conductors were known in the community, but the general disposition seemed to be one of non-interference, although there was an occasional murmur of disapproval. On one occasion Joseph Morse was arrested for aiding in the escape of a slave. At that time Woodford County had no jail and he was taken to Pekin in Tazewell County, by William T. Magarity, who was sheriff at the time. The jailer was not at home when

Parker Morse came to Woodford County in 1835. The family first settled in the vicinity of what later became Low Point, but in a short time they moved a mile south of the present site of Cazenovia, in Metamora Township. There were several members of the family and the vicinity soon became known as the Morse settlement or Morsetown.

Levi P. Morse was but 15 years of age when he came thru with his father to Illinois and he drove a team the entire distance from Vermont. Other members of the family were Joseph T., Milton and Mark Morse. These were among the first abolitionists who came

Parker Morse's farmhouse was in a good location to be an UGRR station. At that time, the road running in front of the house was the main road to Chicago. A fraction of a mile behind the house was railroad tracks. Most times slaves were taken north by horse-drawn wagons, and sometimes they were disguised as free blacks and put onto actual trains.

In these trips the towns were avoided as much as possible as there was more danger of betrayal attached to going through a town. It was a common occurrence to see bills posted offering a reward of \$50 to \$100 reward for the capture of some run-away boy or girl. Occasionally the reward was even greater than that. This was an incentive to aid in the recovery of any fugitive that might be seen, and made it necessary to take the quiet roads. Much of the traveling was done at night, and every precaution possible was taken to

Mr. Magarity arrived with his prisoner so that Mr. Morse was left until his return. On the jailer's appearance, the prisoner was discharged as his papers were not sufficient to warrant his detention. The indictment against him was finally quashed.

As to methods, these differed according to circumstances, the emergencies of the occasion, or the taste, convenience or resources of the operator. Deacon Levi Morse, of Woodford County, near Metamora, had a route towards Magnolia, Putnam County; and his favorite "car" was a farm wagon in which there was a double bottom. The passengers were snugly placed below, and grain sacks, filled with bran or other light material, were laid over, so that the whole presented the appearance of an ordinary load of grain on its way to market. The same was true as to stations and routes. One, who was an operator, says: "Wherever an abolitionist happened on a fugitive, or the converse, there was a station, for the time, and the route was to the next anti-slavery man to the east or the north. As a general rule, the agent preferred not to know anything beyond the operation of his own immediate section of the road. If he knew nothing about the operations of another, and the other knew nothing of his, they could not be witnesses in court."

At one point, Joseph T. Morse, of Woodford County, was also arrested, taken to Peoria and committed to jail, but acquitted on trial.

**From Emma Julia Scott.** "Captain Parker Morse and Joseph T. Morse staked off the UGRR route from Parker Morse's to Samuel Work's and William Lewis'. Occasionally meetings of the brethren were held at these cabins, where the fearless abolition men and women met to receive such aid and encouragement in the labors as they could give one another, when not cheered by the presence of some of the leaders in this great cause. At these meetings they were threatened with violence, and saluted with other equally objectionable marks of displeasure used by bitter neighbors, but they lived it down and saw the perfect reward of the labors. Parker Morse said: 'Eight tenths of all the Negroes who came under my observation were of white mixture. They were of all shades and color from the jet black African through all the gradations to nearly pure Caucasian.'"

### The Farnsworth House

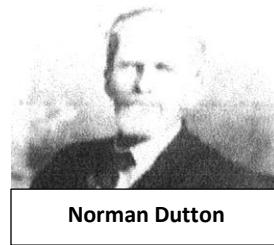
#### Meeting Place of Abolitionists

The "Farnsworth" house on Banta Road is often thought to be part of the UGRR, but in fact was used only by Abolitionists to hold secret meetings on the third floor. The home was later owned by the Gronewald family.



#### Bits and Pieces...

- Both George Kern and Norman Dutton are buried in Oakwood Cemetery in Metamora.
- The UGRR was a loose network of houses and people, and slaves reached their destinations in different ways. There were likely almost as many routes as escaping slaves.
- Between 40,000-100,000 slaves successfully reached Canada via the UGRR.
- Most escapees came from the upper southern states, such as Kentucky and Virginia because of the difficulty of escaping the Deep South.
- The Emancipation Proclamation decreed that all slave in Rebel territory are free as of January 1, 1863. The Proclamation DID NOT free slaves in states that never left the Union.



Norman Dutton

#### Contact Us

Questions, ideas...

We would love to hear from you. Laure Adams, President, 369-2353 or [jrfarmer@mtco.com](mailto:jrfarmer@mtco.com); Kenneth Willman, Vice President, 367-4426; Jack Weddle, Treasurer, 645-0963 or [jweddle@mtco.com](mailto:jweddle@mtco.com); Board members: Dave Pohlman, 369-3290; [pohlman46@yahoo.com](mailto:pohlman46@yahoo.com); Lee Summer, 367-4059, 635-0259, [lsummer@mtco.com](mailto:lsummer@mtco.com); Mary Curry, 367-2185, [curry@mtco.com](mailto:curry@mtco.com); Jim Efaw 367-6099, [jimefaw@eggroll.com](mailto:jimefaw@eggroll.com)