

# Different Routes to Freedom

Buying Freedom  
Fighting for Freedom  
Escaping to Freedom  
Negotiating Freedom

# Buying Freedom

## Buying Freedom



Out on the South Carolina frontier, young Frank McWhorter was moving west. As he looked around the small wilderness farm where he was born and grew up, Frank was not sorry to leave. The 18-year-old thought of the years of exhausting work—clearing land, plowing fields, harvesting crops. And he remembered the years of terror, as colonists and soldiers killed one another in the bloody fighting of the American Revolution. That revolution freed the United States, but it did not free Frank McWhorter. Frank was an African American slave.

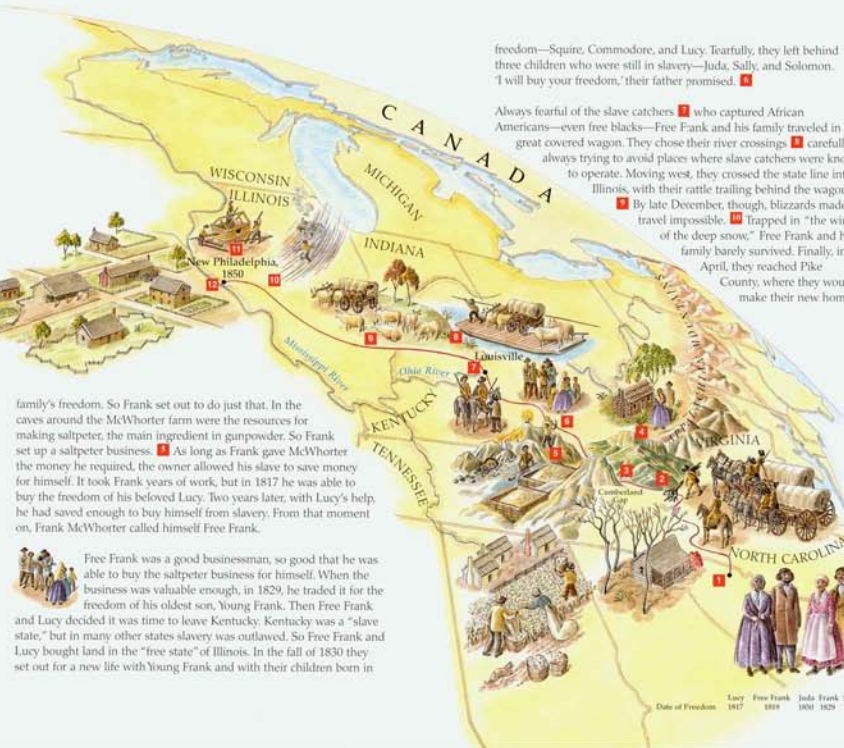


Now Frank's owner, George McWhorter, was going west to settle the nation's new frontier in Kentucky. He sent Frank ahead with other pioneers on the dangerous journey through the Cumberland Gap. As the travelers struggled across the Appalachian Mountains on the narrow Wilderness Trace, they were under constant threat of attack from American Indians. The Indians rightly feared that the new settlers were going to seize their land. The journey was only 200 miles long, but it took Frank's wagon train a month to reach the Pennyroyal frontier in Kentucky.



Life in Kentucky was even harder. To set up his owner's new home, Frank chopped down trees and cleared the land. He fenced in fields and planted corn. And he guarded the farm from Indian attack. Frank also met and married Lucy, with whom he would share his life for the next 55 years. Lucy, too, was a slave, owned by a master in another settlement. Within a year, Frank was a father, a father deeply determined to gain freedom for his family.

Good workers like Frank were prized on the frontier, and George McWhorter hired him out to other pioneers who needed help. Frank saw his chance. By working extra time, he was allowed to earn money for himself. If he could save enough, he realized, he could buy his



freedom—Squire, Commodore, and Lucy. Tearfully, they left behind three children who were still in slavery—Juda, Sally, and Solomon. 'I will buy your freedom,' their father promised.

Always fearful of the slave catchers who captured African Americans—even free blacks—Free Frank and his family traveled in a great covered wagon. They chose their river crossings carefully, always trying to avoid places where slave catchers were known to operate. Moving west, they crossed the state line into Illinois, with their rattle trailing behind the wagon. By late December, though, blizzards made travel impossible. Trapped in "the winter of the deep snow," Free Frank and his family barely survived. Finally, in April, they reached Pike County, where they would make their new home.

family's freedom. So Frank set out to do just that. In the caves around the McWhorter farm were the resources for making saltpeter, the main ingredient in gunpowder. So Frank set up a saltpeter business. As long as Frank gave McWhorter the money he required, the owner allowed his slave to save money for himself. It took Frank years of work, but in 1817 he was able to buy the freedom of his beloved Lucy. Two years later, with Lucy's help he had saved enough to buy himself from slavery. From that moment on, Frank McWhorter called himself Free Frank.

Free Frank was a good businessman, so good that he was able to buy the saltpeter business for himself. When the business was valuable enough, in 1829, he traded it for the freedom of his oldest son, Young Frank. Then Free Frank and Lucy decided it was time to leave Kentucky. Kentucky was a "slave state," but in many other states slavery was outlawed. So Free Frank and Lucy bought land in the "free state" of Illinois. In the fall of 1830 they set out for a new life with Young Frank and with their children born in



Slavery lay just 15 miles away, across the Mississippi River in Missouri. So almost immediately Free Frank went to the county seat to register his family as free blacks, legally purchased from slavery. Then Free Frank and Lucy and their children set to work building a house and a farm. They planted 80 acres of wheat and corn and soon were raising cattle and hogs. By 1835 Free Frank had enough money to buy the freedom of his son Solomon and to bring him from Kentucky.



Still, Free Frank did not stop for there were children and grandchildren left in slavery in Kentucky. On land that he had been buying little by little, Free Frank founded a town. He called it New Philadelphia. By selling land in the town to new settlers, Free Frank was able to free his daughters and grandchildren from slavery. As he looked at his farm and his town, Free Frank was proud. But nothing in his life would make him as proud as buying the freedom of his family.

### FREE FRANK FACTS

- In 1795, when Free Frank left South Carolina, about 5,000 settlers traveled the Wilderness Trace into Kentucky.
- According to the laws of slavery, children born to a free mother were free. By buying Lucy's freedom first, Frank ensured that their future children would be born free.
- The money that Free Frank earned purchased freedom for a total of 15 family members, plus himself.

Lucy, Free Frank, Juda, Frank, Sally, Solomon, Lucy Ann, Squire, Commodore, Perinella, Commodore, Louisa, Cabin, Cabin, Robert, Lucy Ann, Charlotte, and children  
Date of Freedom: 1817 1819 1829 1829 1843 1850 born free 1850

# Fighting for Freedom

## "Give Us Free!"

**1839** Margru screamed in terror. Chaos surged around the little girl as she tried to hide on the deck of *La Amistad*. The African men had already killed the ship's captain and the cook. Now two sailors were escaping over the side into a small boat. As Margru and the three other African

children on board watched, the African men took over the ship. They tied up the two Spanish men who had bought them as slaves just a few days before. And they threw the dead into the sea.

Sengbe Pieh was in charge now. It was Sengbe who had found the nail that the Africans used to open the chains that bound them. It was Sengbe who had quieted the children as the men crept up onto the deck. And it was Sengbe who now ordered the Spaniard Pedro Montes to sail them home to Africa.

Home! Thinking about the families and places they had left behind was almost more than the men and children could bear. Months before, they had been snatched away from everything they knew and loved. Marched to the coast by slave catchers, they had been sold to slave traders, who threw them into cages called *barracoes*. After spending two months in the *barracoes*, Sengbe, Margru, and hundreds of others were shipped across the Atlantic on a slave schooner. Conditions on the ship were so foul, so inhuman, that many captives died—so many that sharks followed the ship, waiting for the dead bodies to be tossed overboard.

In Cuba, the Africans had been sold once again. Sengbe, Margru, and 51 other Africans had been purchased by two Spaniards: Pedro Montes bought the 4 children and Jose Ruiz bought 49 men. The Spaniards loaded their human



purchases onto the *Amistad* to travel home along the coast of Cuba. But all of this changed on the July night when the Africans revolted.

Each day after the revolt, Pedro Montes steered the ship east, toward Africa, as Sengbe ordered. At night, however, Montes changed direction. Secretly, he was trying to sail the ship back to Cuba. But the winds blew the *Amistad* north along the coast of the United States. By late August the ship was off Long Island. There, U.S. officials seized the *Amistad*, certain that it was the ship they had been

looking for. (Word of the *Amistad* revolt had reached the United States from Cuba, where the two sailors who escaped had told their story.)

Now the questioning began. For Sengbe, Margru, and the other Africans, it was a time of fear and confusion. In a language they could not understand, they were accused of murder and piracy. Pedro Montes and Jose Ruiz said the Africans were slaves and belonged to them. The Spanish government, too, said the Africans were slaves, property like the blankets and guns and soap also on the *Amistad*. The ship, the "murderers," and the cargo must be returned to their owners, they said. Americans who owned slaves agreed. But many others did not. Soon, American abolitionists—people who wanted to abolish slavery—took up the cause of the *Amistad* captives.



As arguments swirled around them, the African men were put in jail. The children—Margru, Teme, Kagne, and Kali—were taken into the home of the jailers, Colonel and Mrs. Pendleton. Newspapers were filled with reports about the African captives. Americans filed through the jail to look at them. Abolitionists collected money to help them. And a local professor began to search for someone who could understand them.

On September 19, 1839, the first court case was decided in New Haven. An American court could not try the Africans for murder or piracy, the judge

said, for the events had not happened in American waters. But still the Africans were not free. Another court, another judge, would decide whether they should be sent back to slavery or sent home to Africa. In jail, Sengbe and the other men talked among themselves. "What will happen to us? Will we never be free?" they asked. But no one understood. Then one day James Covey, a free African man, was brought to the jail. He spoke to them in Mende, a language they all understood. With shouts of joy, the men began to talk and talk and talk. At last they could tell their story and people would understand.



On a cold November day in Hartford, Sengbe went to court for the next trial. With Covey to translate, he told the story of the *Amistad* and its captives. He told of the terrors they had faced, and he asked for their freedom. "Give us free! Give us free!" Sengbe cried.

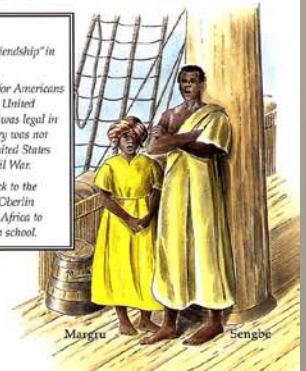


There would be still another trial, in the U.S. Supreme Court, but finally the men and the children of the *Amistad* were given back their freedom. On November 25, 1841, Margru and Sengbe and the others sailed for Africa. As those who had helped them waved goodbye, they went home, free.



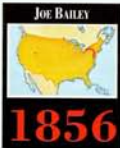
### AMISTAD FACTS

- *La Amistad* means "friendship" in Spanish.
- In 1839 it was illegal for Americans to import slaves into the United States. But slavery itself was legal in half of the nation. Slavery was not fully outlawed in the United States until 1865, after the Civil War.
- Margru later came back to the United States, attended Oberlin College, and returned to Africa to become the principal of a school.



# Escaping to Freedom

## Big Joe Bailey Takes the Underground Railroad

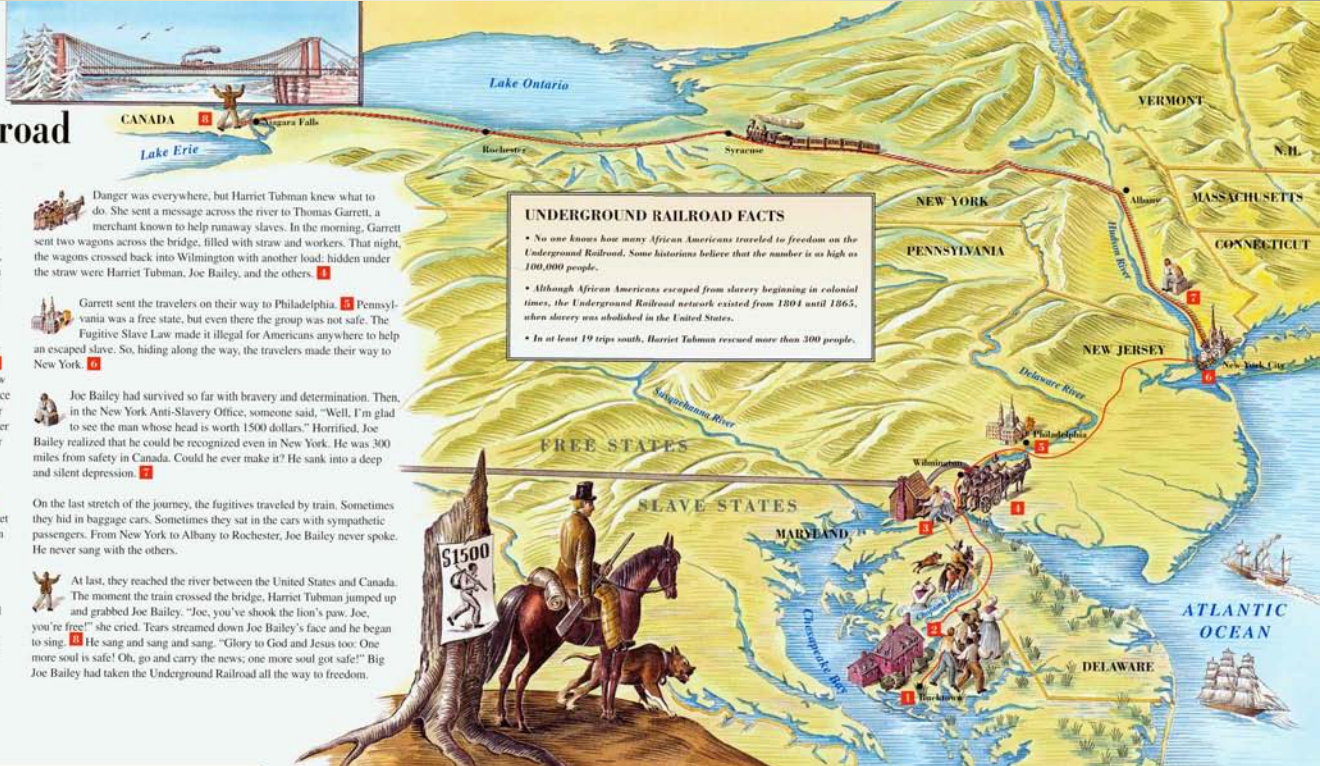


**1856**  
It was dark when Harriet Tubman came for Big Joe Bailey. On the night of November 15, 1856, Harriet Tubman guided Joe Bailey and his brother Bill, Peter Pennington, and Eliza Nokey away from Bucktown, Maryland, where they were held in slavery. She led them away from their owners in the South and took them to freedom in the North, where slavery was against the law.

For the first six days and nights, Harriet Tubman took Joe Bailey and the others through slave states—Maryland and Delaware. They were pursued from the beginning, but Harriet Tubman knew how and where to hide. She had led people north many times since her own escape in 1849. Following the North Star by night, she guided her group through woods, along roads, over fields, even into swamps. Wherever possible, she hid their tracks by walking through streams. Water “never tells no tales,” she said.

Sometimes hiding separately, sometimes wearing disguises, the fugitives pressed on. They walked by night and hid by day. Harriet Tubman knew who would help her on the journey. A secret network of people formed an “underground railroad,” an escape route from slavery. At “stations” along the way—on someone’s farm, in a home, a church, or a store—brave people hid runaways.

By the time the group reached the bridge into Wilmington, there were posters all around. A reward of \$1500 was offered “to any person who will apprehend the said Joe Bailey and lodge him safely in the jail.” Other posters offered \$12,000 for the capture of “Moses,” the mysterious person who was stealing slaves. Like Moses in the Bible, Harriet Tubman led her people to freedom.



**UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FACTS**

- No one knows how many African Americans traveled to freedom on the Underground Railroad. Some historians believe that the number is as high as 100,000 people.
- Although African Americans escaped from slavery beginning in colonial times, the Underground Railroad network existed from 1801 until 1865, when slavery was abolished in the United States.
- In at least 19 trips south, Harriet Tubman rescued more than 300 people.

Danger was everywhere, but Harriet Tubman knew what to do. She sent a message across the river to Thomas Garrett, a merchant known to help runaway slaves. In the morning, Garrett sent two wagons across the bridge, filled with straw and workers. That night, the wagons crossed back into Wilmington with another load: hidden under the straw were Harriet Tubman, Joe Bailey, and the others.

Garrett sent the travelers on their way to Philadelphia. Pennsylvania was a free state, but even there the group was not safe. The Fugitive Slave Law made it illegal for Americans anywhere to help an escaped slave. So, hiding along the way, the travelers made their way to New York.

Joe Bailey had survived so far with bravery and determination. Then, in the New York Anti-Slavery Office, someone said, “Well, I’m glad to see the man whose head is worth 1500 dollars.” Horrified, Joe Bailey realized that he could be recognized even in New York. He was 300 miles from safety in Canada. Could he ever make it? He sank into a deep and silent depression.

On the last stretch of the journey, the fugitives traveled by train. Sometimes they hid in baggage cars. Sometimes they sat in the cars with sympathetic passengers. From New York to Albany to Rochester, Joe Bailey never spoke. He never sang with the others.

At last, they reached the river between the United States and Canada. The moment the train crossed the bridge, Harriet Tubman jumped up and grabbed Joe Bailey. “Joe, you’ve shook the lion’s paw. Joe, you’re free!” she cried. Tears streamed down Joe Bailey’s face and he began to sing. He sang and sang and sang. “Glory to God and Jesus too: One more soul is safe! Oh, go and carry the news; one more soul got safe!” Big Joe Bailey had taken the Underground Railroad all the way to freedom.

# Negotiating Freedom

