

Grover Barn: An Historic Overview

(January 30, 2018)

The Grover barn (2819 Stone Barn Terrace, near Clinton Parkway and Lawrence Avenue) is one of the most significant Underground Railroad sites in Lawrence. Ardent abolitionists Joel Grover, who arrived in Lawrence in 1854 with the second New England Emigrant Aid Company party, and his wife Emily, sheltered freedom seekers in the 1858 stone barn on their farm southwest of Lawrence, Douglas County, Kansas Territory during the late 1850s. The site's role as a "station" on the Underground Railroad is well documented in the historical record. In addition, it is one of the few territorial period structures remaining in Lawrence and perhaps the only historic agricultural site within city limits.

Elizabeth Abbott recalled that during that time her husband took "two mullattos" on the Underground Railroad to the "next stopping place...I think it was Joel Grover's." Several sources tell of eleven "slaves" and a free-born baby who were hidden at the Grover barn in January 1859. The abolitionist, John Brown, and his men had liberated them from slavery in Missouri the previous December in a highly publicized raid. After a brief stay of 1 to 4 days (sources vary as to the exact dates of arrival and departure) at the Grover barn, the caravan, led by Brown, left the farm sometime between January 24th and January 28th and headed to Topeka, Kansas. The group proceeded up the Lane Trail through Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois and Michigan before arriving in Detroit, Michigan. There John Brown saw the freedom seekers cross over the Detroit River into Windsor, Canada on March 12, 1859.

While the site is significant in Lawrence's history, it is of national importance as well. Not only is it a site where John Brown is known to have been engaged in abolitionist activity, the identities of most of the freedom seekers in the caravan he led to Canada are known as well. The event is exceedingly well-documented, appearing in six different historic accounts. In 2013, researcher Judy Sweets was able to locate and contact descendants of freedom seekers Sam and Jane Harper living in Windsor, Ontario, Canada. Although they knew their ancestors had been born in the U.S. and probably came to Canada on the Underground Railroad, they had no idea that John Brown led their ancestors to freedom in Canada.



*Grover's Barn, late 1800s
Douglas County Historical Society, 1982.230.004*