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John Parker, a former slave, planned many rescue attempts of slaves held captive in the “borderlands” of Kentucky. Born a slave in Norfolk, Virginia, Parker was sold at the age of eight to a doctor in Mobile, Alabama. The doctor’s family taught him to read and write and allowed him to apprentice in an iron foundry where he was compensated and allowed to keep some of his earnings. He was later purchased by an elderly patient of the doctor’s and bought his freedom with money from his apprenticeship. He moved to southern Ohio and around 1853 established a successful foundry. Parker is believed to have assisted many slaves to escape from the Kentucky side of the Ohio River. Parker, who was well-known by regional slave catchers, risked his own life when he secreted himself back into slave territory to lead fugitive slaves to safety. Once the slaves were in Ripley, Ohio, Parker would deliver them to Underground Railroad conductors such as John Rankin in the town who would harbor the fugitives and help them to the next depot on the network.

John Rankin House (Ripley, Ohio)

Presbyterian minister John Rankin is believed to have been one of Ohio’s most active “conductors” on the Underground Railroad. In addition, he wrote *Letters on American Slavery*, first published in 1826. It was the first clear statement on antislavery views printed west of the Appalachian Mountains. It became standard reading for abolitionists all over the country. From 1822 to 1865, Rankin, along with his wife and children, assisted hundreds of escaped slaves in their move to freedom. Located on the Ohio River, John Rankin’s home was considered one of the first stations on this route of the Underground Railroad. It was here that Harriet Beecher Stowe heard the escaping slave’s story which became the start of her famous book, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. John Parker wrote of Rankin, “At times attacked on all sides by masters seeking their slaves,” [John Rankin and his sons] beat back their [attacker], and [kept them out of their home]. A lighted candle stood as a beacon which could be seen from across the river, and like the North Star was the guide to the fleeing slave.

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