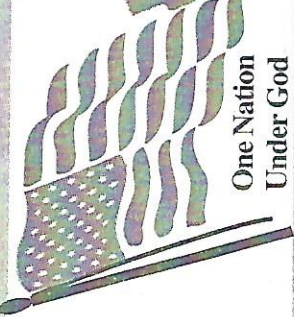


PF  
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Underground Railroad

Wednesday, May 18, 2005

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# THE PAPER

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**Speak-Out . . .**

**Why is alcohol being served?**

I'd like to know why there is alcohol being served in the new North Webster Community Center? I have been in there numerous times with alcohol parties, I have donated a lot of money to the community . . . See Page 4

**Neighbor . . .**

Life has been pretty good for a pretty good guy. The course in which the smiles and the accolades have set upon Warsaw High School junior Michael Conrad has taken a lot of hard work. So much so, it's a surprise he ever sleeps.



## Underground Railroad may have passed through county

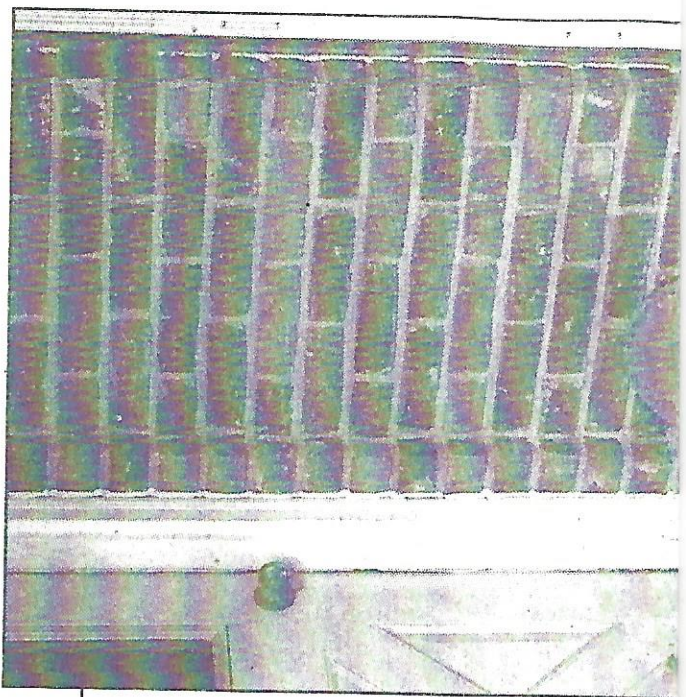
By STACEY ANDERSON  
Assistant Editor

Under the cover of darkness, slaves traveled by foot or were hidden in hay wagons on a dangerous journey to freedom. Along the way they were helped by antislavery campaigners, both black and white, who risked their lives by operating the Underground Railroad.

Filled with drama and horror, the UGRR network was established by 1820 with definite routes into Canada from Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, New York, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, Missouri, Michigan and other states. The rivers and tributaries of Indiana made UGRR route variations possible and more than 30 stations existed on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. In short, history and geography tells us that Kosciusko County may have had a handful of houses that were part of the famed path to freedom.

Plain Township Assessor Jean Lynch says she is aware of four locations in the

**BRICK AND SLATE** — Howard Larsen of Leesburg helped tear down the old Mason home and, in doing so, collected some 33,000 bricks and numerous pieces of slate from the roof. Larsen used the bricks to add on to his existing home and still has pieces of the slate. (Photo by Stacey Anderson)





ball, Conrad is insanely busy. The sports junkie himself is a three-sport star for Wawasee... See Page 6

# Good Neighbors . . .

## Cleaning glassware

**Good Neighbors:** To help with the problem of etching or cloudy glassware in the dishwasher: Buy powder Cascade (powder) and Glass Magic (powder), available at Meijer, and pour into separate plastic containers. Use 1/2 tsp. of each in dishwasher. Also, keep fluid rinse dispenser full. Put all clear glassware in bottom rack, including water... See Page 10

### Inside

- For A Fun-Filled Weekend Visit The Crusin Cuse Car Show At Syracuse See Page 14
  - Tie Up To The Marina Directory See Page 11
  - Take A Step Back In History At Oswego Days See Page 20
- Special Section*
- It's Time For Spring Cleaning And Remodeling. Don't Miss Our Home Section

network of safe houses, also known as stations, along the railroad. Though three are no longer standing, a fourth, she claims, still exists on SR 15 south of Warsaw. Another remains strictly in historical form as bricks from the original home were used to add on to an existing house.

County historian Marge Priser noted there is no proof that the white colonial home standing on SR 15 near Claypool that Lynch refers to was ever part of the secret network. "To date, I don't know for sure there were any (safe houses) in the area," she said. "From everything I've



1938 LEESBURG -- An aerial map of Leesburg from 1938 shows the location where Thomas Mason's home was located. It is believed that the 2 1/2 story brick home, which no longer exists, was part of the famed Underground Railroad. The house was located just south of Armstrong Road and on the west side of Old SR 15. Of the three larger black squares, Mason's home was the one furthest south. (Photo provided by Area Plan Commission)

seen the route was around by the Plymouth area. I think (local claims) are mostly hearsay." But Priser admitted, "It's not been anything I've been intrigued enough to pursue."

Dan Groff is the present owner of the Claypool home. He estimated it was built in the 1830s, about the time the first sawmills would have been established and bases that information on the number of timbers used to construct the home. Although Groff has never found any hidden rooms or tunnels in the house, he said it had renovated three times prior to his occupancy.

Lynch, however, is certain that the UGRR did have some tie to the county. She and others, including Howard Lursen of Leesburg and Darcy Deeter of Warsaw, all told that two homes located on the west side of SR 15 (Detroit Street) and south of Main Street were thought to be part of the system. Though both houses were long ago torn down to make way for the Warsaw Community Public Library, Lynch recalled seeing the tunnels under the houses.

"When they were being torn down (probably in the 1950s) and I saw it with my own eyes," she told. "There was a network of tunnels under those houses. It was quite something."

Deeter said she learned of the houses' ties to the secret network when her son, then a student, was writing a report for school. "It was more on old houses," she said of the report, "but the owner (Janet Brooks) told about the connection (to the Underground Railroad) and the tunnels. Apparently they went toward the depot at one time, but they had been closed off at that time."

The last home rumored to be part of the slaves' escape route was a majestic 2 1/2-story brick home located in Leesburg. A 1938 aerial map of the property, provided by the county Area Plan Commission, showed the home located just south

of Armstrong Road on land where the gravel pit is now located.

The only information indicating the property existed as part of the UGRR is referenced in a booklet, "Slavery: The Underground Railroad Movement and Some History Related to Wabash County."

The booklet noted slaves crossing the Ohio River were assisted at night by abolitionists who would see the passengers on their way to the first station. To avoid those who sought runaway slaves, passengers were hidden in hay wagons and driven from LaGro to North Manchester, then to Thomas Mason's home in Leesburg before moving further north to Stephen Bogue's house in Cass County, Mich., on to Detroit and eventually into Canada.

Lursen, who was born, raised and has lived his entire life in Leesburg, never heard about the UGRR connection to the brick house, but if it's true, his home has become somewhat of a historical monument. In 1979 and 1980, Lursen helped tear down the brick home and, between himself and another man, collected some 33,000 bricks. Lursen used the bricks to add on to his existing home.

"That house even had a slate roof on it," Lursen told. "I even have some of that, too. What didn't get broken when the walls were knocked down, I saved."

Although Lursen never saw anything in the house indicating it may have played a role in history, he said the interior was pretty well destroyed when he got involved in the demolition.

Whether the Claypool house, the two houses long ago torn down in Warsaw and Thomas Mason's home were ever part of the route to freedom may never be known, but it has been documented that escape routes stretched from the southern slave states into the North and on to Canada, certainly making it possible that this Kosciusko County area holds a great historical secret.