

\*Local History 101: Making Life-Changing  
Decisions in the Kankakee River Valley  
\*Webinar Purpose and Procedure

Episode 2: Antebellum Abolitionists (from 1838-60)  
Presenter: Dr. James Paul  
KCC Lifelong Learning Institute—11/5/2021



Thomas and Margaret Durham's  
1835 arrival in Bourbonnais Grove

Episode 2 Overview  
I. Introduction/Background  
II. Presentation by Thomas Durham  
III. Interaction with Thomas Durham  
IV. Conclusion

[www.bourbonnaishistory.org](http://www.bourbonnaishistory.org)  
For Members/Resources/Local  
History Series/Antebellum  
Abolitionists Narrative.

Graphic design by Christina Bradley—2019

1. Hello, my name is Dr. Jim Paul.

All you need right now is pen and paper. Please put your phones on “silent mode”. This session will be recorded. The complete “Antebellum Abolitionists Narrative” with slides will be posted on the Bourbonnais Grove Historical Society website under Members/Resources/Local History Series/Antebellum Abolitionists Narrative. Please use this link <https://bourbonnaishistory.org/resources>.

There are four parts to this course presentation: 1) Introduction/Background; 2) Presentation by Thomas Durham (1784-1854)—who you see here, arriving in Bourbonnais Grove in 1835 with his wife Margaret (1796-1882); 3) interaction with Thomas Durham at his farmhouse in 1853; and 4) Conclusion—learn how your companion on this journey addressed the issue of slavery and abolition.

This is the second in a series of courses entitled Local History 101: Making Life-Changing Decisions in the Kankakee River Valley. The first course was entitled Potawatomi Peril (to 1838). The next course in the series, Episode 3, is in the planning stage. It will be The Life and Legacy of George Letourneau: from Bourbonnais and Kankakee mayor to Illinois state senator—1860-1906.

These courses will immerse course participants in the gut wrenching decisions of the individuals who lived in the Kankakee River Valley. The purpose of these course programs will be to engage the audience in a new way. The goal is not to have two levels of learning in the traditional two planes of narrator-audience, teacher-student, and presenter-audience, but to achieve one level in which all parties immerse themselves in the past. For example, during this course program, you will walk in the shoes of Kankakee River Valley residents, and I will become Thomas Durham. You will be compelled to make life-changing decisions in the 1850s.

In the first part of this course, you must assume the identity of a person who lived in Kankakee River Valley during the 1850s. Please pick a number from one to ten. [Pause until the number is picked. Continue after everyone has picked her/his number.] The number you picked represents the person next to the number.

1. French-Canadian Farmer
2. French-Canadian Shop Keeper
3. Quaker Member of Durham Family
4. Shop Keeper from Chicago
5. Methodist Farmer
6. Equal Rights Activist
7. Bourbonnais Township Official
8. Roman Catholic Clergy—Nun or Priest
9. Kankakee County Law Enforcement Official
10. Teacher

*\*Please choose a name for yourself as a person living in the 1850s.*

2. In the first part of this course program, you must now assume the identity of a person who lived in Kankakee River Valley during the 1850s. Please pick a number from one to ten. [Pause until the number is picked. Continue after everyone has picked her/his number.] The number you picked represents the person next to the number. Please pick a name for yourself.

## Definitions

**Abolitionist**—a person who opposes a practice or institution, especially capital punishment or slavery.

**Antebellum**—occurring or existing before a particular war, especially the Civil War.

**Fugitive Slave Acts**—statutes passed by Congress in 1793 and 1850 that provided the seizure and return of runaway slaves who escaped from one state to another or into federal territory. Fugitives could not testify on their own behalf nor were they permitted a trial by jury. Heavy penalties were imposed on federal marshals who refused to enforce the law or from who the fugitive escaped; penalties were also imposed on individuals who helped runaway slaves or who helped slaves to escape. Was this "Bloodhound Law" a "slave power conspiracy" to get more power?

**Underground Railroad**—a system of cooperation among active antislavery people in the U.S. before 1863 by which people escaping enslavement were secretly helped to reach the North or Canada.

3. No additional narrative for this slide.





4. No additional narrative for this slide.

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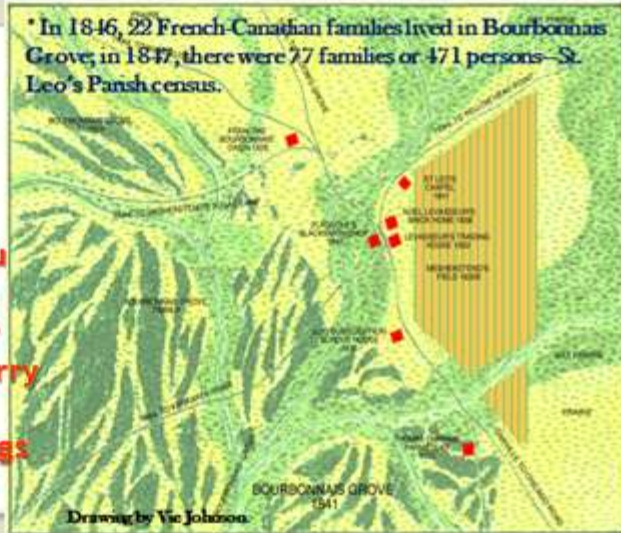
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**Underground Railroad**—a system of cooperation among active antislavery people in the U.S. before 1863 by which people escaping enslavement were secretly helped to reach the North or Canada.

5. With your new identity, you are now compelled to make decisions about the Fugitive Slave Act which was strengthened by Congress in 1850. Make your decision by choosing and answering one or more of the statements provided here. Please write down your choices before going to the next slide.

Please pick a number from one to ten. [Pause until the number is picked. Continue after everyone has picked her/his number.] The number you picked represents the person below that will walk with you in the 1850s. Please write her/his name below along with your life-changing decision picks from the previous page. You will learn this person's view on slavery as you come to the end of the 1850s.

1. Thomas Durham
2. Margaret Durham
3. Noel LeVasseur
4. Ruth LeVasseur
5. George Letourneau
6. Elodie Letourneau
7. Fr. Charles Ciniquy
8. Martha Durham-Perry
9. David Perry
10. Rev. Stephen Beggs



6. No additional narrative for this slide.



You will soon visit with Thomas Durham in his farmhouse in 1853—congress strengthened the Fugitive Slave Act three years before. You will role-play as the person whose identity you have assumed. Durham will ask you this question: “Will you assist in the hiding of runaway slaves?”

\*Consider what question you will ask Thomas Durham.

7. What follows is my interpretation of events from 1838-60. I have relied on local historian Vic Johnson’s writings and research which include archival notes from Robert Durham and Don Saupe, relatives of the Durham-Perry family. Local historian Adrien Richard stated reasons for the meager records of Bourbonnais Grove. In pp. iv-v of his *The Village: a Story of Bourbonnais* (published in 1975) that “The absence of village documents and records prior to 1913, reportedly lost in a grocery store fire where the board meeting were held at the turn of the century, created a void in the story of Bourbonnais. Then too, the residents of Bourbonnais, apparently satisfied with their township government, waited 45 years (May 13, 1875) before acquiring the status of an incorporated village, so that any form of civic records prior to incorporation are as well non-existent.” One must also bear in mind that any activities related to hiding runaway slaves in the Bourbonnais Grove area in the 1850s and 1860s would have been kept secret, and no records kept in case a person was accused of this crime.



## From Whig to Republican Party—Founded March 20, 1854 (6 days after Thomas Durham's death)

- Whig Party formed in 1833 as moralistic opposition to Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policy;
- Whig Party self-destructed over expansion of slavery to the territories;
- Anti-slavery faction opposed its own incumbent, President Fillmore, and nominated Gen. Winfield Scott in 1852—lost to Franklin Pierce; by 1856 the Whig Party was dead;
- The new Republican Party had three factions: 1) Radical or Black Republicans who were abolitionists; 2) Moderate Republicans like Abraham Lincoln who were for "free soil" but opposed both slavery and abolitionism; and 3) Conservative Republicans who thought slavery was bad because it hurt white people and blocked progress.

8. No additional narrative for this slide.

## The Kansas-Nebraska Act became law on May 30, 1854.

**1854**

The Kansas-Nebraska Act established the Kansas and Nebraska territories with the issue of slavery to be decided by their settlers.

**1857  
-58**

During the Lecompton Crisis, pro-slavery advocates drafted a state constitution that excluded free blacks and protected slavery. Congress rejected that constitution, and Kansas entered as a free state.

**1857**

In *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, the Supreme Court ruled that African Americans were not citizens of the United States. Overturning the decision became a rallying cry for the new Republican Party.

**1860**


Republican Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election with a plurality of the vote, while the Democratic Party split between its Southern and Northern wings.

\*1857—African Americans are declared property, so they are not protected by the United States Constitution.


9. No additional narrative for this slide.

*Father Charles Chiniquy (1809 – 99)*

- \* Arrived in Bourbonnais Grove from Montreal in 1851 at age 42;
- \* Served as Maternity Blessed Virgin Mary pastor from Nov. 1852 to Sept. 1853 (supported temperance);
- \* Quarreled with Chicago Diocese Irish Bishop Anthony O'Regan for prejudice against French-Canadians;
- \* Founded new colony of several French-Canadian families in St. Anne area;
- \* Recruited settlers in Canadian, French, and Belgian newspapers;
- \* Defended by Abraham Lincoln in 1855 libel suit;
- \* Suspended and then excommunicated in August-September 1856;
- \* Left Roman Catholic Church and formed Christian Catholic Church of St. Anne (which in 1862 became part of the Canadian Presbyterian Church); and
- \* Went back to Canada in 1873 to begin Presbyterian mission to entice French-Canadians away from the Roman Catholic Church.



10. No additional narrative for this slide.




**REPUBLICAN TICKET.**

*For President.*  
ABRAHAM LINCOLN.  
*For Vice-President.*  
HANNIBAL HAMLIN.  
*Election of President and Vice President.*  
LEONARD SWETT,  
JOHN M. PALMER,  
ALLEN C. FULLER,  
W. B. PLATO,  
LAWRENCE WELDON,  
WM. P. KELLOGG,  
JAMES STARR,  
JAMES C. CONKLING,  
H. P. H. BROMWELL,  
THOS. G. ALLEN,  
JOHN ONLEY.

*Governor.*  
RICHARD YATES.  
*Lieutenant Governor.*  
FRANCIS A. HOFFMAN.  
*Secretary of State.*  
OZIAS M. HATCH.  
*Auditor of Public Accounts.*  
JESSE K. DUBOIS.  
*State Treasurer.*  
WILLIAM BUTLER.  
*Superintendent of Public Instruction.*  
NEWTON BATEMAN.  
*New Constitution - Yes.*

*Representative in Congress.*  
OWEN LOVEJOY.  
*Senator.*  
ALONZO W. MACK.  
*Representatives.*  
FRANKLIN BLADES,  
SAMUEL STORRS,  
FRED. H. MATHER.  
*State's Attorney.*  
CHAS. H. WOOD.  
*Clerk of the Circuit Court.*  
*For Sheriff.*  
HENRY C. VANMETER.  
*For Coroner.*  
GEO. R. LETOURNEAU.

Copy of the 1860 Republican Ticket Voted in Kankakee County—supervised by Lt. Herman Kenaga of the 12<sup>th</sup> Illinois Cavalry, McLellan's body guard, in the office of the *Kankakee Gazette*. It not only bears George Letourneau's [sic] name and that of the presidential candidate, but also those of Col. Alonzo Mack of the 76<sup>th</sup> Illinois Infantry (who was the right arm of the war governor Richard Yates) and Governor Yates.





11. No additional narrative for this slide.



### George Letourneau's Political Career



- Bourbonnais Township Supervisor—1856, 1867, and 1876;
- Delegate to First Republican State convention at age 25 where the attendees were spellbound by Lincoln's "Lost Speech"—1856;
- Kankakee County Coroner—1860-63;
- Circuit Clerk of Kankakee County—1872-76;
- First Mayor of Bourbonnais at age 44—1875-76;
- Kankakee County Sheriff—1882-86;
- Kankakee County Treasurer—1886-90;
- Mayor of Kankakee at age 60—1891-92;
- Illinois State Senator (38th and 39th General Assemblies)—1892-96;
- Deputy County Treasurer—1896-1906

The "rail splitter"

12. No additional narrative for this slide.

### Routes to Freedom in Illinois

David Aldrick's "round house" in Wilmington, IL—a station on the underground railroad

Joseph "Pap" Tetter and the 1862 underground railroad in Hopkins Park, Pembroke Township (Kankakee County)

13. No additional narrative for this slide.



## The Tetter Family

The 1860 U.S. Census had counted 20 African Americans living in Kankakee County. The black population of Kankakee County then doubled in the early 1860s when Joseph "Pap" Tetter, his wife Mary, and their 18 children arrived in what is now Pembroke Township.

Although accounts vary, the Tetter family is generally believed to have escaped from slavery in South Carolina about the time the Civil War began in 1861. They made their way northward, eventually settling in the area that became Hopkins Park.

Pap Tetter acquired 42 acres of land, most of which he subdivided and sold to other arriving settlers. According to some accounts, he used the funds to set up and operate a station of the Underground Railroad at Hopkins Park.

Today, descendants of Pap Tetter continue to live in Pembroke Township and other communities across Kankakee County.

Kankakee County Museum Signage

14. No additional narrative for this slide.

## Local Connections



In addition to Wilmington and Hopkins Park in northeastern Illinois, local folk lore in Bourbonnais, Illinois suggests that Thomas Durham (1784-1854) and his former Virginia Quaker family may have harbored fugitive slaves in the basement of their farmhouse—today part of the Durham-Perry Farmstead, a Kankakee County Historic Landmark located at 459 N. Kennedy Drive, Bourbonnais, IL (also known as the Perry Farm Park).

15. No additional narrative for this slide.

The "Shutter" Barn Quilt on the Horse Barn (1840) at the Durham-Perry Farmstead seems appropriate.



16. No additional narrative for this slide.

## Quilt Codes Guided the Slaves to Freedom



*Flying Geese:* A signal to follow the direction of the flying geese as they migrated north in the spring. Most slaves escaped during the spring; along the way, the flying geese could be used as a guide to find water, food and places to rest. The quilt maker had flexibility with this pattern as it could be used in any quilt. It could also be used as a compass where several patterns are used together.



*North Star:* A signal with two messages—one to prepare to escape and the other to follow the North Star to freedom in Canada. North was the direction of traffic on the Underground Railroad. This signal was often used in conjunction with the song, "Follow the Drinking Gourd", which contains a reference to the Big Dipper constellation. Two of the Big Dipper's points lead to the North Star.



*Rose Wreath:* this code meant that someone had died on the journey.

Courtesy of Patricia M. Paul


17. No additional narrative for this slide.



18. No additional narrative for this slide.



Welcome to my home—  
November 5, 1853.



I was born on October 1,  
1784.

My Quaker Abolitionist  
Legacy

**1787** Constitutional Convention delegates refused to recognize a "right to property in man," leaving the question of slavery to Congress and the states. However, this compromise on the constitutional status of slavery. The **Slave Trade Clause** prohibited Congress from ending the importation of slaves until 1808. The **Fugitive Slave Clause** prohibited slaveholders' power to reclaim escaped slaves. The **Three-Fifths Clause** counted three-fifths of the enslaved population for purposes of representation.

The **Northwest Ordinance** established a framework for governing the Northwest Territory and protecting the civil liberties of settlers. It also banned slavery in the territory north of the Ohio River.

**1793** The **Fugitive Slave Act** permitted slaveholders to cross state lines to reclaim allegedly escaped slaves.

**1807** Congress banned the importation of slaves, which took effect in 1808. It was the earliest date the Constitution permitted Congress to impose such a ban.

**1820** Under the **Missouri Compromise**, Missouri was admitted as a slave state and Maine as a free state. It also banned slavery to the north of a set line within the Louisiana Territory.

**1820s** The **Negro Seamen Acts** prevented free black sailors from freely disembarking in slave states and exercising their constitutional rights. Instead, they were often jailed in local prisons.

**1823** In *Corfield v. Coryell*, Justice Bushrod Washington interpreted the Constitution's Privileges and Immunities Clause as protecting a set of fundamental rights, including the right to make contracts. The circuit court opinion would influence the drafting of the 14th Amendment.

**1830s** Congress imposed a "Gag Rule," barring the House of Representatives from considering anti-slavery petitions. It was eventually defeated.

**1832-33** During the **Nullification Crisis**, South Carolina voted federal tariffs as unconstitutional and sought to declare them null and void. The state eventually backed down and accepted the supremacy of federal law.

**1833** In *Barron v. Baltimore*, the Supreme Court ruled that the Bill of Rights only restricted Congress and did not protect Americans against state actions of fundamental rights by the states. This would change with the 14th Amendment.

19. Thomas Durham, Jr. (1784-1854) speaks about his life as an abolitionist.

Long before I came to Bourbonnais Grove in 1834, my family was abolitionist. I was born to Thomas and Arabella Durham on October 1, 1784, just three years after the commander of the British Army, Lord Cornwallis, surrendered to General George Washington at Yorktown on October 20, 1781. That decisive battle was just a day's ride from our farm home in Brunswick County, Commonwealth of Virginia. My father, Thomas Durham-Madkins, was born about 1740 in the commonwealth's James City County. He purchased land in Lunenburg County, Commonwealth of Virginia on June 10, 1764. He had just gotten married to Arabella Marrow. My paternal grandfather's surname was Durham, but when he died, my paternal grandmother married a Madkins. When my brothers, Daniel, William, and I married, we used only the Durham surname.

My father joined the Quakers in 1782 at Blackwater Monthly Meeting, and my mother joined at the same meeting in 1784. The first Quakers (or Religious Society of Friends) began around 1650 in England, breaking away from the established Church of England. My Quaker tradition emphasized a close relationship with Jesus, reading and studying the Bible, and equality of all people. We emphasize refusal to participate in war, swear oaths, drink alcohol, and enslave others. Therefore, we Quakers support abolition of slavery, prison reform, social justice, and philanthropic efforts. This was the religious and family environment that I was born into.

## Abolition and Slavery Timeline

- \* 1782--My father free our slaves;
- \* 1787--Underground railroads began with Quaker Isaac T. Hopper;
- \* Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery (Philadelphia, 1787)--Benjamin Franklin is honorary president;
- \* By 1790 there are 700,000 slaves in a nation of 3.9 million;
- \* Slaves attempt to flee to northern free states;
- \* 1793--Congress passes the Fugitive Slave Act which allowed slave owners to cross state line to retrieve alleged runaway slaves;
- \* January 6, 1794--my father died; and
- \* Formation of the Liberty Party (pro abolition of slavery) in 1840.

20. In 1782, the year of his Quaker conversion, my father freed our family's slaves. He wrote "I Thomas Durham Madkins being fully persuaded that freedom is the natural right of all mankind . . . [freed] Negroes whom I have held" [From Vic Johnson and Robert Durham's research]. With this proclamation, my father freed Hannah (age 36) and her children Charles (17), Dick (16), Bett (14), Beck (13), Peg (11), Jacob (6), Ben (4), and Ann (3). He reserved the prerogative of acting as guardian over them until the males reached age 21 and the females reached age 18. Father also purchased and freed on November 3, 1792 two near relatives of Hannah: Maria (age 13) and Squire Durham (23). Many of these newly freed individuals took the family name of Durham. My father died on January 6, 1794 when I was only nine years old.







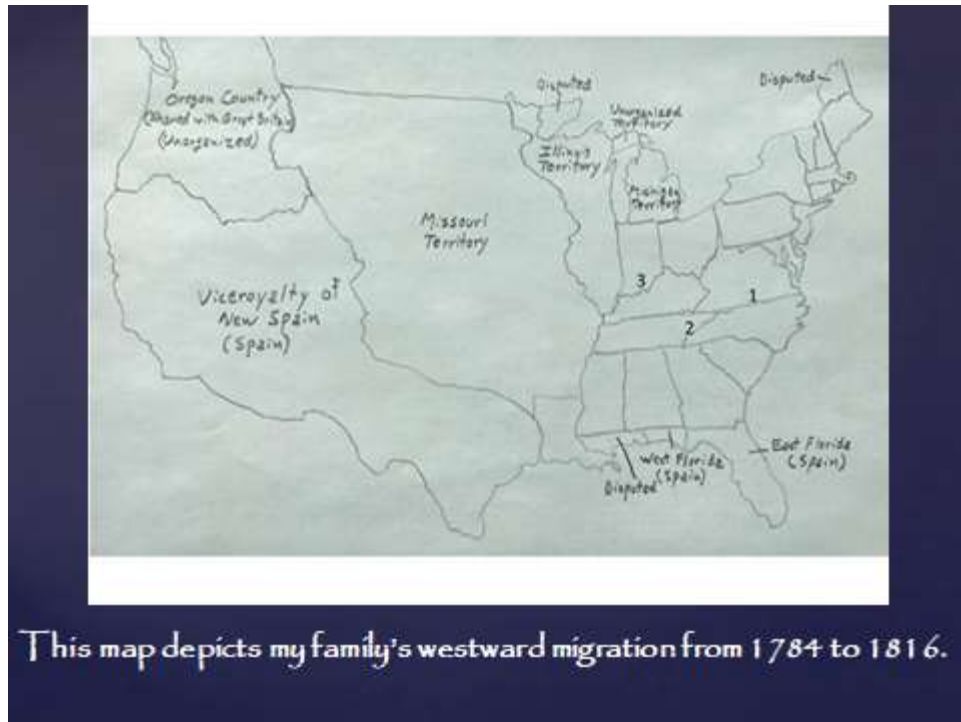
23. No additional narrative for this slide.



24. In 1806, our whole Durham family and some of our now free Negro family members migrated across the Blue Ridge Mountains into the Great Smoky Mountains of Blount County in eastern Tennessee where there was subsistence agriculture and few slave owners. We joined the Quaker Newberry Monthly Meeting [Friendsville, Tennessee]. Mother died there on March 2, 1808. A short while later I fell in love with fifteen-year-old Peggy [Margaret] Wyly. We married on October 17, 1811. James W. was our first born in 1812, followed by Thomas who died in 1816 at age two. Our daughter Barbara was born in 1816. Peggy is currently pregnant with our fourth child.

Our family was encouraged to travel north by the sermon of the Quaker Zachariah Dix which he delivered in 1803 at the Bush River Monthly Meeting in Newberry, North Carolina. He stated:

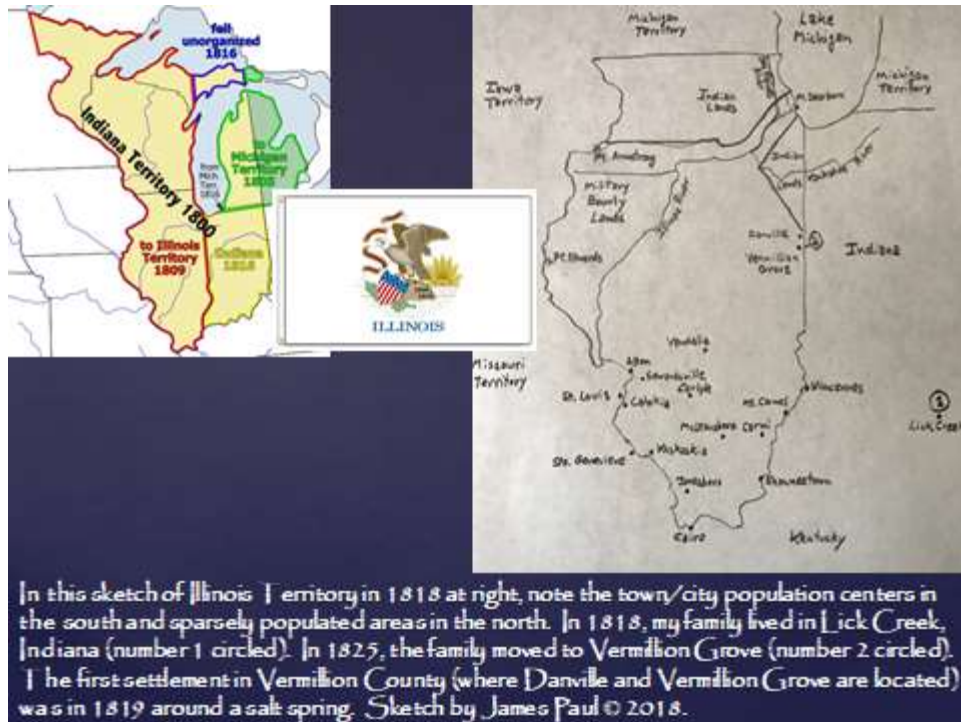
“O Bush River! Purge thyself. Young men, young women, to you I appeal. The great northwest territory lies over the mountains beyond the Ohio River. It is a wild forest. It is a wilderness. From the wigwams of the savage the smoke still ascends through the boughs of the trees, but it is a fertile land. It is a land forever dedicated to human freedom. There you can make productive fields. There you can make friends with the Red Man. To you I appeal, flee to that land. Shake the dust of human bondage from your feet for your own sake and for the sake of your children’s children. This system of human slavery will fall. The cup of its iniquity is well-nigh filled. Go to the Northwest Territory! Look not behind you into this Sodom of human slavery, for the fires of Heaven shall descend upon it and the wrath of the Almighty shall consume it” [springborohistory.org/Quaker migrations/anti-slavery sentiments].



25. Heeding this command, our family is now in the newly born [1816] state of Indiana. Our Lick Creek community includes a free Negro settlement. This Indiana community is rich in hardwood forest, but some of us keep thinking about a move west of the Wabash River. If the Illinois Territory constitutional assembly abolishes slavery, many of us would like to settle on its fertile prairie. Good day to thee!

Thy faithful servant,  
Thomas R. Durham



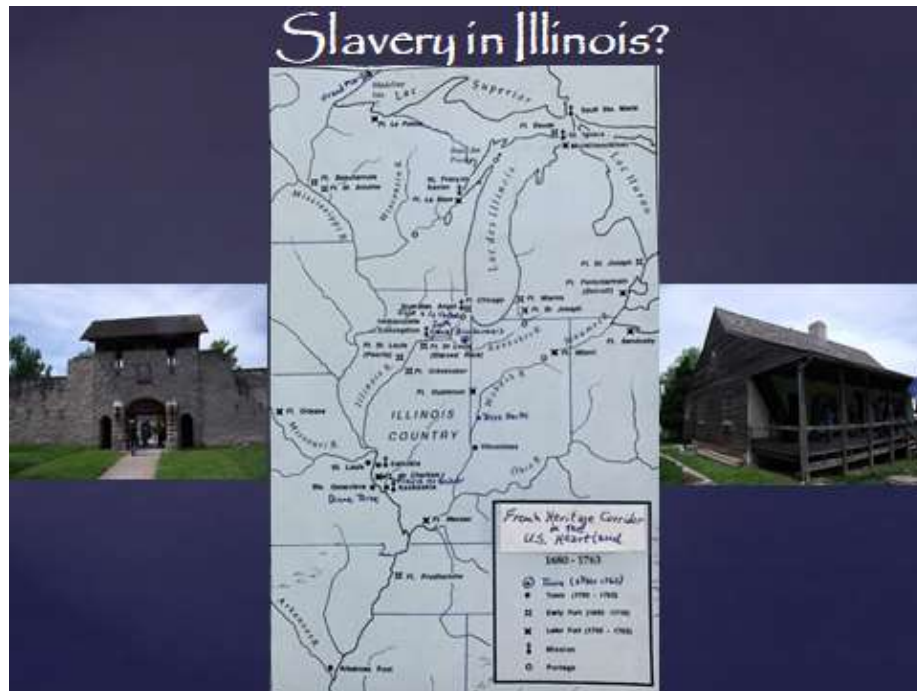


26. [The following account is an interpretation of what pioneer and Quaker abolitionist Thomas R. Durham might have written in a letter to friends in September 1818. In 1834, Durham would become the first non-Native American to begin a farmstead on land that today is known as Perry Farm Park.]

My dear friends,

I hope this letter finds thee enjoying a nice September 1818 day. I will begin my correspondence with our blessed family news. Just a few weeks ago on August 19, 1818, my wife Peggy gave birth to our third living child, Artemacy, in the eastern mountains of Blount County, Tennessee. I was so happy, and could not wait to bring them to our new Durham family home in the integrated settlement of Lick Creek, Indiana where my extended family now resides. Many former slaves also live here. Peggy, the baby, and our other two children—six-year-old James and two-year-old Barbara—are now with us in Lick Creek.

I would like to relate to you now the news about the “Illinois question”— will it be a free or slave state? I was eating dinner with my immediate family and my brothers’ and sisters’ families when the news from Kaskaskia, capital of the Illinois Territory, arrived. After dinner, I said, “Can thee believe it? The thirty-three Illinois constitutional assembly legislators met for only 21 days from August 3 to 24th and did not abolish slavery in their proposed new state! How can we possibly consider a move into a future state of Illinois while such an attitude toward human rights exists? It does not seem that we Quaker abolitionists are destined to move further west.”



27. That evening my family discussed the Illinois slavery issue until bedtime. We questioned how the Illinois territorial legislators could permit slavery when the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 forbade it. I mentioned that the ordinance did allow the French colonials of Ste. Genevieve, Kaskaskia, Cahokia, and other French settlements to retain their slaves in a type of “grandfathering” clause. There persisted an impression that the French slaves had more rights than British colonial or southern U.S. slaves. But “Slavery was slavery!” I exclaimed, and “Morally speaking, how can a questionable French ‘gentile’ slavery be any better than British or U.S. abusive slavery?” Furthermore, the new August 1818 Illinois Constitution affirmed the practice of long term indentured servitude in which an unfree laborer was bound by contract to work for an employer for a fixed time. Freedom would only come after the contract expired. This meant that the African Americans already living in Illinois Territory could be put under long term indentures. Indentured servants were considered marketable property. The new constitution claimed to forbid the future introduction of slavery—except at the salt springs in Shawneetown, Illinois until 1825 (it took 100 gallons of water to produce 1 bushel of salt). But how reliable is this claim when so many former and present slave owners live in Illinois? The territory is scheduled to hold elections on September 17-19 for governor, lieutenant governor, general assembly, U.S. representative, and two U.S. senators. Former slave owner Shadrach Bond is favored to win the governor’s seat. The first lieutenant governor is likely to be Montreal-born Pierre Menard. He was chosen to balance the ticket by attracting Illinois French-speaking voters. Before retiring for the evening, Peggy and I made a decision: we will not move to Illinois until the abolition of slavery in the state is a certainty.

Thou faithful servant,  
Thomas R. Durham

## The Illinois Question—Will it be a Free or a Slave State?

- \*The 1818 compromise—pseudo-slavery;
- \*Second governor Edward Coles (1822-26);
- \*Defeat of 1824 referendum;
- \*Attitudes—pro-slavery, free soil, and abolition; and
- \*Status of free black people.

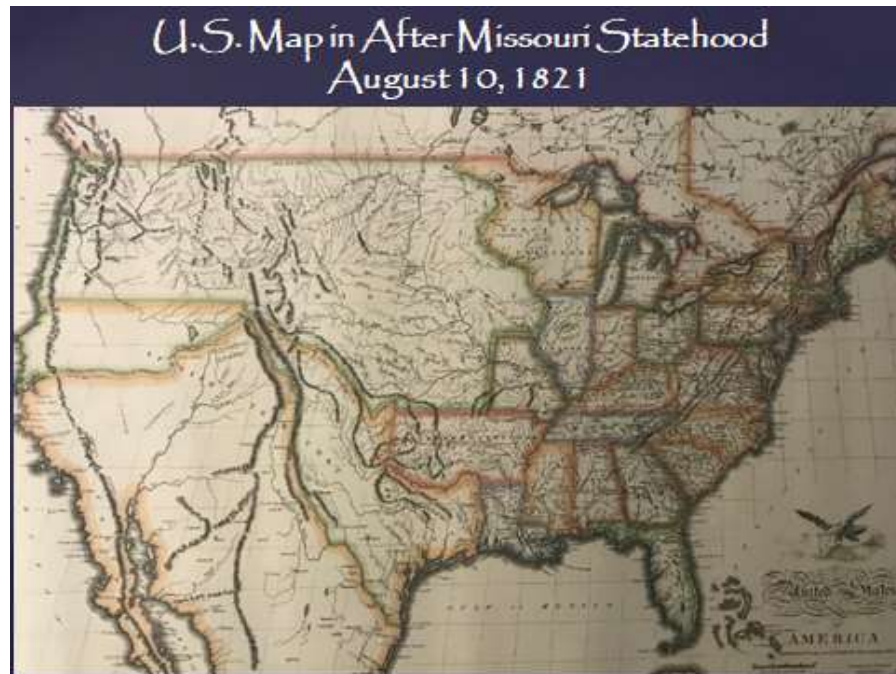
28. No additional narrative for this slide.

## Crisis within the Whig Party—burning questions

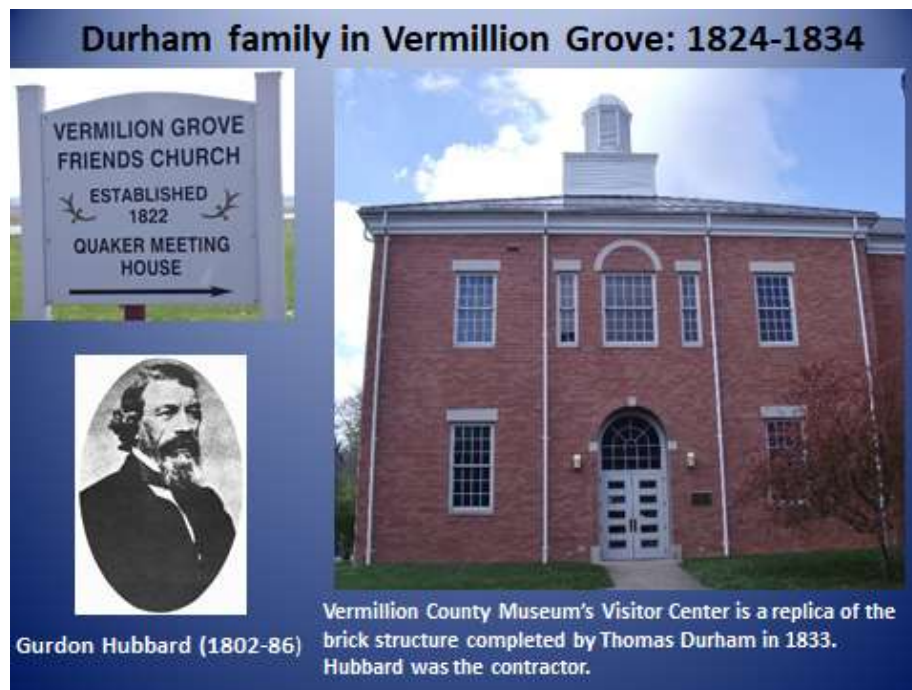
- \*Was slavery or abolition of slavery a factor in you or your family's decision to move to northeastern Illinois?
- \*How do you feel about the "neutral" stand on slavery and abolition taken by the Illinois legislature?
- \*How do you feel about the question of equality (for women, Indians, and Negroes)?
- \*March 3, 1837—Illinois State Representative Abraham Lincoln and colleague Dan Stone issued a statement on the position of slavery adapted by state legislature on January 20, 1837:  
"They [we] believe that the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy, but that the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than to abate its evils."

29. No additional narrative for this slide.





30. No additional narrative for this slide.



31. In September 1824, a referendum in the Illinois general election for a constitutional convention to draft an amendment to legalize slavery was defeated by a vote of 6640 to 4972 (Robert P. Howard, *Illinois: A History of the Prairie State*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972, page 137). The next year, 1825, my family and I moved into Illinois to the Quaker settlement of Vermillion Grove south of Danville.



32. Good day to thee! When I first laid eyes on Twin Oaks in 1834, I was almost 50 years old, but I knew this was where I wanted to spend the rest of my life. I was amazed at the beauty of the land between the Bourbonnais Trace, Bourbonnais Creek, and Kankakee River. Twin Oaks (two large burr oak trees) was where we camped for the night on our walk from the Quaker settlement of Vermilion Grove, south of Danville, to Chicago. I had been hired by Gurdon Hubbard to build a brick warehouse on the corner of LaSalle and South Water Street in Chicago. Hubbard must have been impressed by the new masonry Vermilion County Court House that I had just finished in Danville. Twin Oaks was located just west of the Chicago to Danville Road—about the midway point or 65 miles south of Chicago—where the road intersected with the Bourbonnais Trace [in later times, the address of my farm house became 459 North Kennedy Drive, Bourbonnais, Illinois, after the Bourbonnais Trace was renamed Kennedy Drive—one of the two Twin Oaks still stands south of the Perry Farm House, the other was diseased and cut down in 1990, but a slice of its 200 year-old trunk is displayed south of the smoke tree behind the Letourneau Home/Museum on the Adrien M. Richard Heritage Preserve Arboretum].

After completing the warehouse in Chicago, I purchased the 160 acres Twin Oaks portion of the Jonveau Reserve from Hubbard who was an agent for the land transfers when the Potawatomi were compelled to move west of the Mississippi. This acreage extended from the prairie on both sides of the Bourbonnais Trace to the wet prairie or marsh located west of the Bourbonnais Trace to the Kankakee River. In 1838, I purchased another 164 acres extending my property 83.88 acres to the east and the hardwood forest and limestone canyon “Indian Caves” to the west where the Bourbonnais Creek enters the Kankakee River.



33. In 1835, my wife Margaret (1796-1882), who we called Peggy, and I moved our nine children and possessions from Vermilion Grove to Twin Oaks. My family and I were cordially greeted by the resident Potawatomi. They even constructed a wigwam of boughs for us to use until our log cabin was built. Peggy gave birth to three more of our children at Twin Oaks. We were the first Quaker family and first American-born family to settle in French-Canadian Bourbonnais Grove. By the summer of 1835, I was cultivating 40 acres at Twin Oaks.



My team of oxen and I broke open the prairie at Twin Oaks in 1835  
(sketch by Christina M. Bradley © 2016).

By 1840, we had constructed a timber framed I-shaped two story “tidewater stack” farm house and three-bay English barn. The horse barn was built shortly thereafter along with chicken coups, granary, corn cribs, and tool sheds.

As a Virginia-born individual of Quaker faith, my urge to move north was motivated by my support of abolition and opposition to slavery. In the early 1800s, I moved from Virginia to Eastern Tennessee where I met and married Peggy Wyly in 1811. We then moved to Cherry Creek, south of Terre Haute, Indiana; then to Vermillion Grove outside Danville, Illinois; and finally to Bourbonnais Grove, Illinois



*“Make the slave’s case our own.”*  
1859

Many women were active in both **ABOLITIONIST AND FEMINIST** circles, seeking equal rights for all. In 1832, black women in Massachusetts founded a female anti-slavery society “to promote the welfare of our color.” One year later, Philadelphia women formed one of the first racially integrated societies, supporting the Underground Railroad and petitioning for abolition.

.34. No additional narrative for this slide.

*“Be not partakers of other men’s sins.”*  
ca. 1850

Black and white Northerners formed abolitionist organizations. Founded in 1833, the **AMERICAN ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY** built upon the efforts of earlier groups and sought to unite the movement. Members sent petitions to Congress, organized resistance to slave catchers and kidnappers, and printed literature to spread awareness of the sin of slavery.

35. No additional narrative for this slide.


**1833** In *Barron v. Baltimore*, the Supreme Court ruled that the Bill of Rights only restricted Congress and did not protect Americans against violations of fundamental rights by the states. This would change with the 14th Amendment.

**1842** In *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, the Supreme Court struck down a state law that provided protections to those accused of being fugitive slaves—claiming it violated the Fugitive Slave Clause and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793.

**1846-48** The Mexican War added extensive new territory, fueling conflicts over whether future states would enter as slave or free.

**1850** With the Compromise of 1850, California entered as a free state, but the Utah and New Mexico territories were opened to slavery. The Fugitive Slave Act was also strengthened.

36. No additional narrative for this slide.

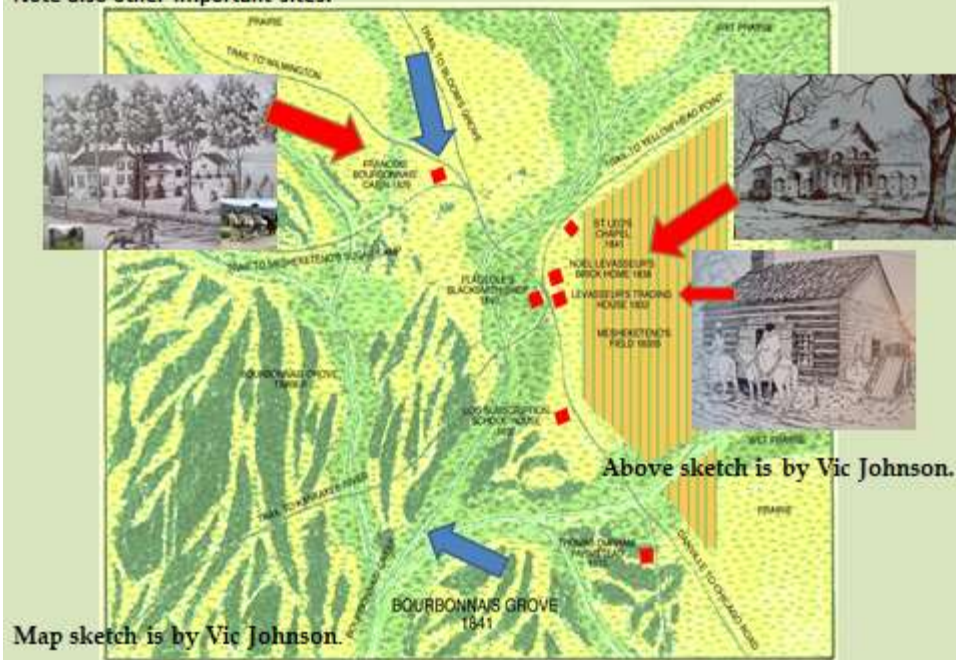


- \*Chicago's population had increased from 100 in 1830 to 4470 in 1840;
- \*The murder of Elijah P. Lovejoy on November 7, 1837 in Alton, Illinois, caused Chicago to declare itself an abolitionist city.
- \*Chicago became a large hub for the routes for runaway slaves.
- \*The slave markets of St. Louis caused many settlers in Illinois to begin to help the runaway slaves.
- \*Both blacks and whites became conductors in the Underground Railroad.

37. No additional narrative for this slide.



The blue arrows point to Bourbonnais Creek below and Francois Bourbonnais Sr.'s cabin above. Note also other important sites.



38. No additional narrative for this slide.

Slavery was abolished in Great Britain (including Canada) on August 28, 1833—took effect on August 1, 1834; from 1435, Papal encyclicals condemned slavery and the slave trade.

At least 22 French-Canadian families lived in Bourbonnais Grove in 1846.

The records of St. Leo's Parish (Bourbonnais Grove) in 1847 note 77 French-Canadian families or 471 persons.

Four reasons for prejudice against French Canadians:

- 1) Foreign immigrants,
- 2) Spoke French,
- 3) Roman Catholic, and
- 4) Poor farmers.

39. No additional narrative for this slide.



- \*I was elected Commissioner of Rock Village Precinct (Will County) in 1836 to a two year term;
- \*During my tenure as Commissioner, the log school was built in 1837 by the volunteer labor of Solomon Yoder and Joseph Bolton—a 1 ½ story 20' x 20' structure.
- \*This was the second log school in the river valley.

Sketch by Vic Johnson




40. No additional narrative for this slide.

During the tenure of the log schoolhouse from 1837-48, these are our children who were of school age:

- \*Arabella, age 16 in 1837;
- \*Harry, age 14 in 1837;
- \*Pleasant, age 13 in 1837;
- \*Martha, age 12 in 1837—on January 1, 1845 she married David Perry;
- \*Margaret, age 11 in 1837;
- \*Thomas, Jr. age 10 in 1837;
- \*Stephen who was ages 5-16 during the years 1837-48;
- \*Gurdon who was ages 3-14 during the years 1837-48; and
- \*Daniel who was born in 1837 and would have gone to the school.

41. No additional narrative for this slide.



Noel LeVasseur

Ruth LeVasseur  
(1818-60)


- \* In 1835, pioneer fur trader Noel LeVasseur (1799-1879) established his trading post in Bourbonnais Grove.
- \* I was the brick mason who built LeVasseur's Early Classical Revival 1 ½ story brick home just north of the trading post.
- \* LeVasseur married Ruth Russell in 1838.
- \* They had eight children (Edward, Julia, Harriet, Lucy and George (twins), Carrie, Freddie, and William/Guillaume Noel).

42. No additional narrative for this slide.

Methodism in Kankakee River Valley from 1835-60

Northern Methodists congregations increasingly opposed slavery, and some members began to be active in the abolitionist movement.

- \* John Wesley was passionately opposed to slavery;
- \* Reverend Francis Asbury told George Washington of his opposition to slavery in Virginia;
- \* Reverend Jesse Walker (1766-1835) was one of first Methodist circuit riders in Illinois and Will County;
- \* After the first Methodist quarterly meeting held at the log school-house in January 1842 (John Sinclair presiding), Bourbonnais Grove became part of the six-week Methodist circuit the following year (Stephen R. Beggs, Levi Jenks, and James Lecken were the ministers).
- \* Reverend Stephen R. Beggs (at right), Circuit Rider to Bourbonnais Grove in 1843;
- \* Reverend Chester Reeder, Circuit Rider in 1853-55;
- \* Reverend James McClean, Circuit Rider in 1855-56; and
- \* Reverend F. J. Cleveland, Circuit Rider in 1856-60



REV. STEPHEN R. BEGGS

43. No additional narrative for this slide.



Fugitive Slave Act—  
Strengthened by Congress on September 18, 1850

**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, CATCHING, AND KEEPING  
SLAVES. Therefore, if you value your LIBERTY,  
and the Welfare of the Fugitives among you, Shun  
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.**

44. No additional narrative for this slide.

- \*Compromise of 1850 – slave catchers and owners can pursue fugitive slaves into free states;
- \*Blacks begin to flee to Canada and Mexico; and
- \*Underground railroad becomes an important avenue of escape for free and fugitive slaves.



45. No additional narrative for this slide.



- February 1853—Formation of Kankakee County;
- July 4, 1853—Illinois Central RR arrives; and
- March 12, 1855—Kankakee Township formed out of Bourbonnais Township.



46. No additional narrative for this slide.

Again, welcome to my home. Enough about  
myself. Now, let's talk.



47. No additional narrative for this slide.

As a Kankakee River Valley resident in the 1850s, you are compelled to make decisions about the Fugitive Slave Act strengthened by Congress on September 18, 1850. You have picked one or more of the following statements. Now, let's talk about this burning issue of slavery and hiding runaway slaves.

1. To this time, I had no opinion on the issue of slavery, but now I believe that silence on this issue is to be complicit.
2. I believe that continuing compromise with Slave States on the issue of slavery is cowardice.
3. Since slavery is spreading as new territories become states, I think it is better to advocate for abolition of slavery even though bloodshed will be involved.
4. In an armed conflict, I am not sure which side (pro-slavery or anti-slavery combatants) will prevail, but I am willing to stand with the anti-slavery forces.
5. I will help hide runaway slaves and thereby commit a felony.

48. No additional narrative for this slide.

### Conclusion

The person who accompanied you on this journey actually had to address the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Let's see how her/his decisions compared or contrasted with your decisions.

1. Thomas Durham (1784-1854)—if he would have lived long enough to join the Republican Party, he would have been a Black or Radical Republican who demanded the abolition of slavery.
2. Margaret (Wily) Durham (1796-1882)—even though her parents were Tennessee slave owners, she became a Quaker soon after she married Thomas Durham in 1811. Like her husband, she was an ardent Quaker abolitionist.
3. Noel LeVasseur (1799-1879)—this French-Canadian prominent pioneer settler of Bourbonnais Grove was a devout Catholic. He was a Radical Republican who "had no patience for defenders of slave power."

49. No additional narrative for this slide.



4. Ruth (Russell Bull) LeVasseur (1818-60)—her ancestors founded Hartford, Connecticut and founded Yale University. As a northeasterner, who came to Danville, Illinois, Ruth would have been opposed to slavery. Like her husband, Noel, she would have supported the Radical Republicans.
5. George Letourneau (1831-1906)—as a prominent political figure, he became the first mayor of Bourbonnais (1875) and later mayor of Kankakee (1891-92). He was one of the leaders of the Republican Party of Kankakee County. As a French-Canadian Catholic who was friends with the Durhams and LeVasseurs, he was an abolitionist.
6. Elodie (Langlois) Letourneau (1834-87)—this childhood sweetheart and later wife of George Letourneau, was also a French-Canadian Catholic. Like her husband, she supported the Radical Republicans and abolition of slavery.
7. Fr. Charles Chiriquy (1809-99)—after 1853, he saw Catholicism as "slavery" and was excommunicated from his former church. To him, Abraham Lincoln as a "savior" in his legal dispute, and "people of French-Canadians descent were like southern slaves" (Brettell, 78). He and his French-Canadian congregation in St. Anne, Illinois, were Radical Republicans.

50. No additional narrative for this slide.

8. Martha Durham-Perry (1825-87)—like her parents, Thomas and Margaret, Martha was a Quaker abolitionist and supporter of the Radical Republicans.
9. David Perry (1806-87)—born in Vermont to a family who served in the French and Indian War and American Revolution, he moved to Mokena in 1834. He was a grist mill operator, carpenter, and farmer after purchasing the Durham farm in 1866. He married Martha Durham in 1845, and agreed with her and her family's political and social views. He became Kankakee County's first treasurer from 1853-59, and was a Radical Republican.
10. Rev. Stephen Beggs (1801-95)—born in Virginia, he was a prominent figure in the formation of the Methodist Church in northeastern Illinois. He followed in the footsteps of Revs. Francis Asbury (Virginia) and Jesse Walker (Illinois) as Methodist circuit riders missionaries, and abolitionists. He preached the first sermon in Chicago in 1831 at Fort Dearborn, resulting in the First Methodist Church of Chicago. He first came to Bourbonnais Grove in the 1840s.

51. No additional narrative for this slide.



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52. No additional narrative for this slide.