

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NETWORK TO FREEDOM**

Summary: Tell us in 200 words or less what is being nominated and how it is connected to the Underground Railroad.

The US Army Corps of Engineers currently owns and operates the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. This canal, build in 1829 by investors, provided a route for freedom seekers on steamboats, schooners, and other water craft. Boats entered at Elk River in Cecil County, Maryland and exited at Delaware City, New Castle County, Delaware. This eliminated approximately 300 nautical miles between Baltimore and Philadelphia. This Chesapeake Bay to Delaware River route to Philadelphia was also safer for smaller watercraft than a voyage into the Atlantic Ocean and Delaware Bay. William Still and Sydney Gay recorded escapes on steamboats and schooners passing through the canal. Local newspapers reported unsuccessful canal-related escapes, and complained about suspicious Philadelphia oyster boats assisting escapes. When some freedom seekers fled from the lower Eastern Shore, a newspaper commented that the close watch kept on the canal would make it difficult for them to pass that way.

S4. Describe the site's association and significance to the Underground Railroad. Provide citations for sources used throughout the text. Timelines are encouraged.

The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal Company, incorporated in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, completed construction of the canal in 1829 and owned the canal until 1919. Stock in the company was purchased by the three states that incorporated the company, the federal government, and private investors. The company collected tolls based on the amount and type of freight, and not on the passengers on board the vessels. Built for the economic advantages it brought to the region, the canal also provided a route for freedom seekers on steamboats, schooners, and small water craft. Boats entered at Elk River in Cecil County, Maryland and exited into the Delaware River at Delaware City, New Castle County, Delaware. This eliminated approximately 300 nautical miles between Baltimore and Philadelphia. For captains of schooners and other small craft, this Chesapeake Bay to Delaware River route to Philadelphia was also safer than the Atlantic Ocean and Delaware Bay route. William Still and Sydney Gay recorded escapes on steamboats and schooners passing through the canal. Local newspapers reported unsuccessful canal-related escapes, and complained about suspicious Philadelphia oyster boats assisting escapes. When some freedom seekers fled from the lower Eastern Shore, a newspaper commented that the close watch kept on the canal would make it difficult for them to pass that way.

The canal, originally a little more than its current fourteen mile length, provided an important escape route for freedom seekers in tidewater Maryland and Virginia, and those living near the North Carolina coast, reducing the time and miles required to move between the Chesapeake and Delaware bays, and eliminating the need to venture into the rougher waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Ships traveled nearly four hundred nautical miles between Baltimore to Philadelphia on the Atlantic route. When the canal opened in 1829, this alternative route across the neck of the Delmarva Peninsula reduced the distance between the two major ports to ninety-eight nautical miles, a savings of approximately

three hundred nautical miles, and hours of travel time. Scores of freedom seekers would take advantage of this improved route out of the Chesapeake Bay region.¹

A slaveholder on the lower Eastern Shore of Maryland expressed concern over freedom seekers escaping through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal two years after it opened. Levin Woolford placed an ad in the *Cambridge Chronicle* offering a \$300 reward for the capture of Nelly Kelly and her children. She was accompanied by her husband Joseph Keene, an experienced sailor. They took Woolford's 23-foot sail-canoe with one gaff-sail. Recognizing Joseph Keene's maritime skills, Woolford wrote that "they will unquestionable make good use of their time, and probably aim to pass up the bay and through the C. & D. Canal. Woolford's recognition of the canal as a potential escape route was accurate. But in this case, the chance of an African American family passing through four canal locks in an open boat was unlikely unless they had forged documents. The successful escapes required subterfuge²

The Baltimore and Philadelphia Steamboat Company, or the Ericsson Line

William Still records two escape incidents on steamboats that operated out of Baltimore and belonged to the Baltimore and Philadelphia Steamboat Company, also known as the Ericsson Line. The escape details in both narratives are reminiscent of Henry "Box" Brown's escape from Richmond to Philadelphia in a freight box in 1849. In the summer of 1857, a free black woman from Philadelphia boarded an Ericsson steamboat in Baltimore. She brought a sea chest with her, her future daughter-in-law, Lear Green cramped inside. Green had a small quantity of food and a bottle of water, and a pillow and quilt for some comfort. The chest was secured with rope and stowed with other freight. Her future mother-in-law snuck into the compartment and lifted the lid once or twice to check on Green's well-being and to give her a breath of fresh air. Escaping from James Noble, a Baltimore butter dealer, Green endured eighteen hours in the chest before the ship arrived in Philadelphia. Now free, she settled in Elmira, New York and married her fiancé, Henry Adams.³

William Peel, alias William Peel Jones also escaped from Baltimore in a confined space on the Ericsson Line. He grew concerned that Robert H. Carr, a grocer and merchant, would sell him as he had done with other slaves. A friend boxed him up, adding straw for padding, and had him shipped as freight to Philadelphia in April, 1859. The friend then traveled on a train to arrive in Philadelphia in time to receive the

¹ US Department of Commerce, *Distances between United States Ports*, 12th Edition, 2012, <http://www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/nsd/distances-ports/distances.pdf>.

² *Cambridge Chronicle*, April 9, 1831.

³ William Still, *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narrative, Letters* [Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872], 281-284; Reward ad, *Baltimore Sun*, June 1, 1857.

shipment. Jones experienced a painful cramp, faintness, and a “cold chill,” during the voyage. The friend met the ship at the dock to show the papers for receipt and request delivery. But the arrival was on a Sunday and the ship’s officer informed him that deliveries were not made on Sundays. Sensing the man’s anxiety, the officer relented a little and let him to look for the box. Jones’s friend found the box and the officer released it to him. But an hour and a half was lost during a search for an available driver with a vehicle large enough to carry the crate. After seventeen difficult hours, Jones emerged from the box. He headed to Canada, but stopped for a while in Albany to work in a store.⁴

Still’s identification of the Ericsson Line and the hours of confinement are clear indicators that Green and Jones passed through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal on the way to Philadelphia. In 1844 the Baltimore and Philadelphia Steamboat Company was incorporated “to operate steamboats to Philadelphia through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal.”⁵ The company was the first to provide “continuous waterway service between Philadelphia and Baltimore” for the purpose of carrying freight and a few passengers between the two cities.⁶ The company designed their ships to fit through the narrow locks to take advantage of the time and cost savings of using the canal between the two major ports. To fit through the twenty-six foot wide canal locks, the company kept the width of their ships within twenty-four feet, an appropriate design for travel through the canal and sheltered bays, but too unstable for the Atlantic Ocean. These narrow ships lacked the bulky side-wheeler design. Instead, they used screw propellers developed by John Ericsson, accounting for the alternate company name, Ericsson Line.⁷

The time taken for the two escapes also reveals the canal route. A steamer out of Baltimore, going through the canal, and arriving in Philadelphia would have traveled 98 nautical miles.⁸ In the open bay, steamers in the 1850s could cover an average ten to twelve miles in one hour, slower if fully loaded with freight. Stops at ports along the route added to the time, plus delays in traversing the canal could add as much as three and one-half hours. Green was in the chest for eighteen hours when the steamboat tied up at a Philadelphia wharf. As for Jones time in the box, subtract the hour and a half delay in Philadelphia, and Jones trip took about fifteen and a half hours. Using the longer eighteen hours for Lear Green, the steamer traveled about five to six nautical miles for each hour, a realistic figure for a 1850s freight steamer making stops along the way. Decades later, in 1882, the company maintained a schedule similar to the travel time for Jones. The Ericsson steamboats left Baltimore at three in the afternoon that year, made stops along the way, and arrived in Philadelphia fifteen hours later.⁹ On the other hand, if the

⁴ William Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 46-47.

⁵ Robert H. Burgess and H. Graham Wood, *Steamboats out of Baltimore* [Cambridge, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1968], 33.

⁶ Ralph D. Gray, *The National Waterway: A History of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, 1769 – 1965*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1967, 106

⁷ Gray, 106; Holly, David C. *Chesapeake Steamboats: Vanished Fleet* [Centreville, Maryland: Tidewater Publishers, 1994].

⁸ US Department of Commerce, *Distances between United States Ports*, 12th Edition, 2012, <http://www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/nsd/distances-ports/distances.pdf>.

⁹ *The Maryland Directory*, 1882, [Baltimore: J. Frank Lewis & Co., 1882]. The cover of the directory showed a schedule and ports of call between Baltimore and Philadelphia for the Ericsson Line. The

steamboats out of Baltimore rounded Cape Charles to enter the Atlantic Ocean and Delaware Bay to reach Philadelphia, the vessel would travel 392 nautical miles. For an eighteen hour non-stop trip by a fully laden 1850s bay steamer, that would require sustaining a physically impossible speed of nearly twenty-two nautical miles an hour. If the ship traveled at the average speed of twelve miles per hour, without stops, the trip would take more than thirty-two hours. The Ericsson Line designed its ships to take advantage of the faster, less expensive route to Philadelphia through the canal. If the company then decided to run those ships around Cape Charles instead, without stops along the way to make the trip more profitable, that decision would have been incomprehensible. Those planning the escapes from Baltimore intentionally chose the Ericsson Line, knowing its direct route and shorter time schedule. Spending fifteen to eighteen hours in a confined space was challenging enough; thirty-two hours would have unnecessarily increased the discomfort and the hazard.

Captains Baylis and Fountain

In 1858, a Virginia court sentenced schooner captain William B. Baylis to forty years in prison for transporting slaves to freedom. William Still wrote that “quite a number of passengers at different times availed themselves of [Baylis’s] accommodations and thus succeeded in reaching Canada.”¹⁰ Still also chronicled the Underground Railroad exploits of a second schooner captain, Alfred Fountain. Still does not explicitly state the water route taken by these two captains sailing freedom seekers out of Norfolk, Richmond, and North Carolina. But he made one reference to a canal lock and in other narratives he provided clues that these captains sailed north through the Chesapeake Bay and the canal to reach Wilmington and Philadelphia. The first narrative presented here is the one referring to Baylis and the lock, and the second one, also involving Baylis, provides another important reason for why captains Baylis and Fountain would use the canal route. The Still narratives that recount the rescues of Captain Fountain that offer further indications the canal route was used are presented after the Baylis incidents. Beyond the information provided in the Still narratives, there are additional reasons to conclude that Fountain and Baylis favored the Chesapeake Bay-Delaware River route through the canal over the Atlantic Ocean-Delaware Bay route for most if not all of their rescues, and these will be discussed.

In the summer of 1856, fifteen freedom seekers boarded the schooner of Captain Baylis at Norfolk. Still identified them: Isaac Foreman, Henry Williams, William Seymour, Harriet Taylor, Mary Bird, Rebecca Lewey, Sarah Saunders, Sophia Gray, Henry Gray, Mary Grey, Winfield Scott, and three children. After 15 hours they approached a canal lock. This timing and the presence of a lock places them at the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. This was the only canal with locks in a direct voyage from Norfolk to Philadelphia. Still noted that “at the lock not unexpectedly three officers came onboard and stopped her,” indicating that searches at the canal were not unusual. In this case a telegram from Norfolk prompted the search, and the officers informed the captain “that his boat was suspected of having slaves secreted thereon.” After questioning

steamboats took fifteen hours between the cities and 16 stops along the way. This closely matches the transport time for Jones and Green decades earlier.

¹⁰ *The Liberator*, June 25, 1858; Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 74-75.

Captain Baylis, the mate, and the captain's son, the only information of importance that they learned from them was that "the yellow fever had been raging very bad in Norfolk."¹¹ This had the desired psychological effect on the searchers, as the malodorous air below decks hinted of yellow fever and curtailed the search. Had the schooner rounded Cape Charles and entered the Atlantic Ocean, the captain would have avoided canal locks and the risk of a search. But the captain chose the canal route as the wiser option. Still presents one of those reasons in this next narrative.

Mary Epps, alias Emma Brown, and Joseph and Robert Robinson arrived in Philadelphia, after sailing from Virginia on Captain Baylis's schooner. Epps came from Petersburg and the Robinson brothers from Richmond. After Still recorded their arrival in Philadelphia in March, 1855, all three found refuge in Canada. Still does not specify the water route taken. But he gave an important reason for why Baylis, or any other Underground Railroad captain, would sail his concealed passengers northward on the Chesapeake Bay and not into the Atlantic Ocean. The captain had to present a bill of lading to port officials, and he had at least two papers identifying ports of call for his voyage. "Of course he was too shrewd to get out papers for Philadelphia," Still wrote. "That would betray him at once. Washington, or Baltimore, or even Wilmington Del., were names which stood fair in the eyes of Virginia. Consequently, being able to pack the fugitives away in the private hole of his boat, and being only bound for a Southern port [albeit to the north], the captain was willing to risk his share of the danger."¹² The further north you travel to ports on the bay, the greater the advantage of using the canal. For example, the canal route from Washington, DC (and Alexandria, Virginia) to Philadelphia measured 249 nautical miles, compared to 415 for the Atlantic Ocean route. Once vessels exited the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal at Delaware City, they could enter Wilmington harbor in eleven nautical miles.¹³

Fountain had routinely used the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal to reach Philadelphia, with Wilmington, Delaware a secondary stop along the way. In 1850, Captain Fountain's homeport was in Baltimore, and he hauled grain and other freight on the schooner *Eliza S.* for H. Kelsey and Company. In 1853, Captain Fountain sailed the schooner *Millsville* for two Baltimore and Philadelphia packet companies. He carried freight for Brown and Son's Canal Line in Baltimore and Hand's Canal Line in Philadelphia, the company names referring to the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal.¹⁴

Experienced Chesapeake Bay schooner captains like Baylis and Fountain knew the ports, channels and local pilots, and were familiar with the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal at the northern end. They knew the advantages of sailing north on the Chesapeake Bay, going through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, and entering the Delaware River to reach Wilmington and Philadelphia over venturing into the Atlantic Ocean and

¹¹ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 559-565.

¹² Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 74-79.

¹³ US Dept. of Commerce, *Distances*.

¹⁴ "Shipping," [Baltimore] *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*, August 13, 1850; "Shipping," [Baltimore] *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*, May 2, 1853; "Shipping," [Philadelphia] *The North American*, July 29, 1853.

entering the Delaware Bay to reach those two Delaware River ports. The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal's main advantage was the shortened distance and sailing time between Chesapeake Bay ports and Philadelphia. Although the distance and time savings was greater for ports in the upper Chesapeake Bay, the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal route did reduce the distance between Norfolk and Philadelphia by twenty-four nautical miles.¹⁵ This savings subtracted several hours of travel time in unpredictable weather for a schooner laden with passengers and cargo. A second advantage the Chesapeake Bay route offered was the multiple stops that a captain could make on the way north to deliver and receive cargo, and take on provisions. Ports like Cambridge, Washington, DC, Alexandria, Baltimore, Havre de Grace, Port Deposit, and Elkton could make a trip more profitable than the paucity of ports on the Atlantic and Delaware Bay side of the Delmarva Peninsula. As previously noted, Still had explained a third advantage important to captains transporting freedom seekers from Virginia and North Carolina. Captains remaining in the Chesapeake Bay and sailing northward could present a bill of lading for any of these slave state ports north of Norfolk, raising less suspicion than identifying Philadelphia as the next port of call.¹⁶ A fourth advantage was greater safety and relative comfort offered by the sheltered inland route. This advantage was particularly important for a captain responsible for a large number of passengers, in some cases more than a score, crowded below deck. If the dark clouds of a storm appeared, or if strong winds threatened to blow the ship off course, the bay offered a captain many inlets and protected harbors. Calmer waves in the bay were less punishing for the ship and the passengers than turbulent ocean waters. For example, in late fall of 1855, Captain Fountain would crowd twenty-one freedom seekers below decks before leaving Norfolk. Visualize a voyage in the ocean under those circumstances; the rocking of a schooner in the rough seas, the malodorous air in an unventilated space overcrowded with twenty-one bodies cramped together for hours, and the inexperience of at least some of those passengers to sea voyages and ocean waves. The unpleasantness of seasickness and the sight, smell, and sound of vomiting for the other passengers may seem like one of the smaller problems in an escape, but an experienced seaman would understand it as another practical reason for choosing the gentler Chesapeake Bay route.

Captain Fountain arrived in Wilmington in July, 1856 with a passenger list that revealed a stop at the northern end of the Chesapeake Bay and near the entrance to the canal. The subtitle in Still's book stated that Captain Fountain arrived with nine passengers, with one North Carolinian's name missing in the text. The North Carolinians named were Peter Heines, Eatontown [Edenton?], Matthew Bodams, Plymouth, and James Morris, South End. The Virginians, all from Portsmouth, were Charles Thompson, Charity Thompson, Nathaniel Bowser, and Thomas Cooper. The last name on the list was George Anderson, Elkton, Maryland. Thomas Garrett gave the count as "four able-bodied human beings from North Carolina, and five from Virginia" in a letter he sent to William Still to inform him that the group would divide up and arrive by train and steamboat. Garrett mentioned that employment was available in abolitionist Elijah F. Pennypacker's Phoenixville, Pennsylvania neighborhood, and North Carolinians would likely be safe there. This employment opportunity could account for the absence of the one North

¹⁵ US Dept. of Commerce, *Distances*

¹⁶ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 77

Carolinian name in Still's list. Garrett must have erroneously added Anderson to the Virginia count. But significantly, among these freedom seekers from the tidewater region of Virginia and North Carolina, Still identified George Anderson as coming from Elkton, Maryland. Elkton, the county seat of Cecil County, lies on the Elk River, the same river as the entrance to Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. Elkton harbor and the canal entrance were approximately five miles apart.¹⁷

In November, 1855 Captain Fountain had loaded a cargo of wheat and concealed 21 freedom seekers on board his schooner. The mayor of Norfolk, leading a posse, boarded the vessel, confronted the captain, and insisted on conducting a search for slaves that disappeared from various places around town. The searchers speared the wheat and haphazardly chopped about the ship with axes. The captain took control over the search, grabbing an axe, delivering a few swings into his ship, and offering to drive the axe into any spot they requested. The bluff worked and the mayor backed off the search. Still reported that after the paying the five dollar search fee, "the captain steered direct for the City of Brotherly Love."¹⁸ This wording by Still is more open to interpretation than the other incidents presented, but sailing a schooner northward from Norfolk in the inland waterway and through the canal was the direct route to Philadelphia, and a safer voyage than the open sea for the twenty-one crowded below decks.

Still had an additional narrative that indicated the use of the canal by these two captains. The harsh winter conditions for the first months of 1856 turned this route into a trap. On March 23, 1856, Thomas Garrett wrote to Still to announce that Captain Fountain arrived in Wilmington from Norfolk with fourteen passengers: Rebecca Jones, and her three daughters, Sarah Frances, Mary, and Rebecca; Isaiah Robinson; Arthur Spence; Caroline Taylor, and her two daughters, Nancy and Mary; Daniel Robinson; Thomas Page; Benjamin Dickinson; and David Cole and his wife. Garrett arranged their transportation to Philadelphia. Still received two groups of passengers, Fountain's, and a second group that had arrived with Captain Baylis. Still reported that Fountain and Baylis had arrived less than twelve hours apart, but did not state where Baylis sailed from, only that "both had likewise been frozen up on the route for weeks with their respective live freight on board." In his book and journal, Still recorded those who arrived with Fountain, but omitted names of those arriving with Baylis. As Garrett stated, Fountain sailed from Norfolk. Baylis may have departed from Norfolk as well, but Still's narrative remained unclear about Baylis's point of origin for his voyage. Still commented that, "without a doubt, one of these Captains left Norfolk about the twentieth of January, but did not reach Philadelphia till about the twentieth of March, having been frozen up, of course, for the greatest part of that time."¹⁹ The Atlantic Ocean and the wide salt-water mouths of the Chesapeake and Delaware bays could not freeze as solidly or as extensively for two months as the brackish waters of the narrowing Elk River and the

¹⁷ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 316-319.

¹⁸ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 165-172; Still recorded the names of all but one of twenty-one rescued from slavery: Alan Tatum, Daniel Carr, Michael Vaughn, Thomas Nixon, Frederick Nixon, Peter Petty, Nathaniel Gardener, John Brown, Thomas Freeman, James Foster, Godfrey Scott, Willis Wilson, Nancy Little, John Smith, Francis Haines, David Johnson, Phillis Gault, Alice Jones, Ned Wilson, and Sarah C. Wilson.

¹⁹ Still, *The Underground Railroad*, 325-334.

constricted canal waterway. An Elkton newspaper described weather conditions that explained a two month delay along the canal route. In early January the *Cecil Whig* reported the following: “The steamboat Union, Capt. Pierson, belonging to the Ericsson Line, was cut through by the ice on the 1st inst. on her way from Baltimore to Chesapeake City. She reached the latter place but sunk after being brought into the canal.”²⁰ A month later, the *Whig* reported that “the ice on the Elk river about Courthouse Point is from 15 to 18 inches thick.”²¹ Courthouse Point is where ship captains would turn their ships northwest and enter the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal.

Still chronicled additional rescues by Baylis and Fountain but the ones presented in this application offered information indicating the use of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal; the reference to the lock the most evident and the reference to taking the direct route to Philadelphia the least evident. The indications in Still’s narrative are not isolated from other factors. Fountain and Baylis’s were familiar with the Chesapeake Bay and had used the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. They were well aware of the advantages of sailing in the Chesapeake Bay and avoiding the Atlantic Ocean in their trips to Wilmington and Philadelphia. These advantages were particularly important for Chesapeake Bay schooners weighted down with cargo and packed to overcapacity with people below decks. The advantages were previously discussed in detail. Briefly restated, the Chesapeake Bay route through the canal to Wilmington and Philadelphia offered the following advantages: the distance and time traveled was reduced; the captains primary source of income was delivering and hauling freight, and the Chesapeake Bay offered more ports and more profit than the Delmarva ports on the Atlantic Ocean and Delaware Bay; a related advantage, captains in Norfolk with bills of lading for a port further north in the Chesapeake Bay attention less suspicion than a captain with a bill of lading for Philadelphia; the sheltered bay was safer than the ocean. If storm clouds appeared or strong winds started blowing the vessel off course, the bay offered many protected harbors and inlets to wait out until the danger passed; the calmer bay waters were less punishing than rougher ocean waves on the ship and the passengers cramped below decks, especially passengers inexperienced with the sea. That captains Fountain and Baylis favored the Chesapeake Bay route through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal rather than the Atlantic Ocean and Delaware Bay route to transport many, if not all, of their Virginia and North Carolina passengers out of slavery is a reasonable conclusion.

The Pearl and the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal: An Added Note

The largest known attempt by a group to escape slavery was on a 54-ton bay-craft named *The Pearl* in 1848. The capture at the mouth of the Potomac River is miles away from the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, but that the canal figured into the planning by Captains Daniel Drayton and Edward Sayres is worth noting. When Drayton was approached the first time to arrange the escape, he wrote that he “declined it at this time, as I had no vessel, and because the season was too early for navigation through the

²⁰ “Steamboat Sunk,” *Cecil Whig*, January 5, 1856.

²¹ “Local Affairs,” *Cecil Whig*, February 2, 1856.

canal.”²² The only canal Drayton would need to navigate between Philadelphia and Washington, DC was the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. When the request was repeated a few weeks later, he accepted and began his search for a vessel. Drayton wrote that “I met Captain Sayres, and knowing he was sailing a small bay-craft, called the Pearl, and learning from him that business was dull with him, I proposed the enterprise to him, offering him one hundred dollars for the charter of his vessel to Washington and back to Frenchtown, where, according to arrangements with friends of the passengers, they were to be met and carried to Philadelphia.”²³ Frenchtown, Maryland, located on the Elk River and only a few miles from the entrance of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, had a railroad and turnpike link to New Castle, Delaware. Sayres was reluctant to sign on to the venture, and disembarking the passengers with friends at Frenchtown meant that Sayres could sail his bay-craft through the C&D Canal without worrying having his passengers discovered during a possible inspection at a lock. Drayton and Sayres “proceeded down the Delaware, and by the canal into the Chesapeake, making for the mouth of the Potomac.”²⁴ (25) Once in Washington, seventy-seven freedom seekers boarded, considerably more than expected. Word of the plan was exposed and as soon as *The Pearl* sailed down the Potomac, a ship followed in pursuit to capture it. In his memoir, Drayton recounted the capture, clearly stating the original intent to sail the ship to Frenchtown and the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal:

"As we approached the mouth of the Potomac, the wind hauled to the north, and blew with such stiffness as to make it impossible for us to go up the bay, according to our original plan. Under these circumstances, apprehending the pursuit from Washington, I urged Sayres to go to sea, with the intention of reaching the Delaware by the outside passage. But he objected that the vessel was not fit to go outside (which was true enough), and that the bargain was to go to Frenchtown. Having reached Point Lookout, at the mouth of the river, and not being able to persuade Sayres to go to sea, and the wind being dead in our teeth, and too strong to allow any attempt to ascent the bay, we came to anchor in Cornfield Harbor, just under Point Lookout, a shelter usually sought by bay-craft encountering contrary winds when in that neighborhood.”²⁵

During the delay *The Pearl* was overtaken by the pursuers. Had the original plan succeeded, the seventy-seven freedom seekers would have disembarked at Frenchtown, Maryland, where their friends would have likely transported them on the New Castle – Frenchtown Turnpike to New Castle, where they would have boarded a ship on the Delaware River and sailed for Philadelphia. After the passengers departed *The Pearl*, Sayres could sail the short distance to the canal, and sail through the canal without apprehension that the ship would be searched and the plot exposed.

²² Daniel Drayton, *Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton ... including the Narrative of the Voyage and Capture of the Schooner Pearl* [Boston, New York: B. Marsh, 1854], Making of America Digital Library, University of Michigan, 24.

²³ Drayton, 24-25.

²⁴ Drayton, 25.

²⁵ Drayton, 31.

Harriet Tubman and Tilly

In 1856, Harriet Tubman planned to bring a young woman named Tilly out of enslavement in Baltimore and on to Canada to join her awaiting fiancé. In Philadelphia, Harriet Tubman boarded a steamboat, and traveled through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal on her way to Baltimore. The steamboat captain provided Tubman with a certificate that allowed her to travel as a free resident of Philadelphia. She located Tilly in Baltimore and boarded a southbound bay steamer with her, rather than one bound for Philadelphia. Tilly lacked the papers needed to travel. The southward faint avoided suspicion long enough to allow Harriet time to convince this steamboat captain, who knew the other captain, to give Tilly papers to allow her to travel into the north. Harriet and Tilly departed the steamboat at Seaford, Delaware, traveled to Wilmington, and Thomas Garrett arranged for Tilly's trip to Canada. Seaford's Gateway Park, where Harriet Tubman and Tilly began their escape through Delaware, is a designated National Park Service Network to Freedom site.²⁶

Philadelphia Oyster Boats

In 1851, the seizure of four oyster boats from Philadelphia in Annapolis for illegal dredging caught the attention of the editor of the *Cecil Democrat*. He advocated the creation of a state maritime police force to end illegal dredging. He noted additional benefits: "A police of this character would also tend to prevent the escape of runaway slaves, by water, and break up the clandestine trade carried on with the slaves, by the crews of these marauding craft."²⁷ Oysterman from the Philadelphia area operating in the upper Chesapeake Bay would transverse the canal to bring the perishable shellfish to the Philadelphia market as quickly as possible. One court docket identified the oyster boat Leu (or Lev) of Philadelphia at Chesapeake City in 1852, when its captain was sued by another captain for damages to his boat.²⁸ In 1857 Henry Morsell, Jim Parker, and Bill Hutton escaped from B. D. Bond, Port Republic, Calvert County, a county on the west shore of Southern Maryland. Bond offered a \$600 dollar reward for their capture. An oyster boat captain put the three men ashore at Back Creek, the entrance to the C&D Canal, perhaps out of concern that a search at Chesapeake City would expose them. They were arrested at the George W. Boulden's fishery on the Elk River, near Frenchtown. At first the men claimed they boarded the boat to drink alcohol, and the captain weighed anchor for Baltimore, telling them he would bring them back. When they realized they passed Baltimore and were entering the canal they insisted on getting off the boat. The editor of the *Cecil Democrat* wrote that "the story may be true, but there

²⁶ Kate Clifford Larson, *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero* [New York: Ballantine Books, 2004], 131-132. Larson cited Garrett to Higham, October 24, 1856, in James McGowan, *Station Master on the Underground Railroad* (Moylan, Pa.: The Whimie Press, 1977), 129-131.

²⁷ "Oyster Boats Captured," *Cecil Democrat*, November 1, 1851.

²⁸ Cecil County, Docket 10.14, case 1074, October 6, 1852, Court House Records Collection, Historical Society of Cecil County.

is some improbability about it.” He added—“Since the above was written, we learn they have acknowledged themselves runaways.”²⁹ The role of Philadelphia oyster boats to assist freedom seekers may warrant a separate investigation beyond the scope of this application. A researcher might want to start with the fact that John David Oliver, a founding member of Philadelphia’s first Vigilance Committee in the 1840s and a committee board member in the 1850s, was an oyster dealer.³⁰

Other Incidents

A local newspaper, the *Cecil Democrat*, reported an unsuccessful escape at the canal in April, 1856. A freedom seeker escaped by canoe from Northumberland County, Virginia, a tidewater county located at the mouth of the Potomac River. Along his way north, he managed to sneak onboard a vessel and hide. The vessel entered the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, and “at Chesapeake City he discovered himself to the Captain,” according to the ambiguous wording in the newspaper.³¹ The sheriff locked him up in the county jail and notified his owner, who had him sold at a public auction in Elkton. Constable Lawrence Simmons bought the man for \$525. Constable Simmons’s jurisdiction included the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal. If he was the constable who arrested the man, state law awarded Simmons half the proceeds for the sale, and Simmons could sell the man in the Baltimore slave market at a sizable profit.³²

In 1856, four freedom seekers escaped from slavery in an Eastern Shore county south of Cecil and were assisted by two free blacks in Elkton. Writing about this escape, the *Cecil Democrat* editor expressed his concern that “several strange boats have been discovered along the shores of the Elk river, which it is believed were abandoned by fugitive slaves.” The editor added that “so strict a watch is kept along the canal and along the Delaware River that it is difficult for fugitives from the lower counties to make their escape in that direction.” This comment indicated the concern slaveholders had about escapes on and across the canal.³³

The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal was a major transportation route in the antebellum period. Underground Railroad transit through the canal to Philadelphia from the Chesapeake Bay region of tidewater Maryland, and Virginia, and, in a few cases, North Carolina, is well documented, and unsurprising. Some narratives may show a clearer link to the canal than other ones, but for reasons discussed, it was a well-traveled and logical route for waterborne escapes. At best, historical investigation provides an incomplete picture of the Underground Railroad activity at the Chesapeake and Delaware

²⁹ “Committed to Jail,” *Cecil Whig*, May 2, 1857; “Supposed Runaways Arrested,” *Cecil Democrat*, May 2, 1857.

³⁰ William Still, Journal C of Station 2, William Still, 1853, 4 (footnote 4), Historical Society of Pennsylvania, <http://hsp.org/journal-c-of-station-no-2-william-still-1853-4>.

³¹ “Sale of a Runaway Slave,” *Cecil Democrat*, April 26, 1856;

³² Clement Dorsey, *The General Public Statutory Law and Public Local Law of the state of Maryland, Laws of Maryland, 1831, An Act Relating to Free Negroes and Slaves*, Chapter 323, *Archives of Maryland Online*, vol. 141, 1068,

<http://www.msa.md.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000141/html/am141--1068.html>.

³³ “Fugitive Slaves,” *Cecil Democrat*, September 27, 1856.

Canal. But the incidents recorded above give a partial view of the efforts to resist slavery at the site.

S5. Provide a history of the site since its time of significance to the Underground Railroad, including physical changes, changes in boundaries over time, archeological work, or changes in ownership or use. Be sure to describe what is included in the present application and how that compares to what the site was historically.

The Chesapeake and Delaware Canal Company, incorporated in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware, completed construction of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal in 1829. Stock in the company was purchased by the three states that incorporated the company, the federal government, and private investors. The canal had one lock at Delaware City, Delaware, one at St. Georges, Delaware, and originally two at Chesapeake City, Maryland, but the company converted them into one lock. By 1900, the canal locks could not accommodate the larger ships plying the Atlantic Ocean. In 1906, President Theodore Roosevelt authorized a study to determine the possibility of converting the lock canal into a sea level canal. The federal government purchased the waterway in 1919, turned operation of the canal over to the US Army Corps of Engineers, and charged the Corps with responsibility for expanding the canal. By 1927, the canal was wider, deeper, and free of locks, but after the canal reopened it became apparent that another expansion was needed. In the 1930s, workers widened and deepened the canal further. But the Army Corps of Engineers recognized the canal was still inadequate when eight ships collided with the bridges on the canal between 1938 and 1950. In the 1950s, Congress authorized more work on the canal, expansion began in the 1960s, and the Army Corps of Engineers completed the work in the 1970s. The waterway that opened in 1829 at ten-foot deep and sixty-six feet wide expanded to its current depth of thirty-five feet and width of four hundred and fifty feet. During the first decade of expansion, the Delaware River exit was shifted a few miles from Delaware City to Reedy Point. The Delaware City Branch Canal has an abandoned canal lock, constructed in 1854 to replace the original lock at the site. The Army Corps of Engineers retained ownership of this section of the canal. Although blocked off from the Delaware Bay, this stretch of canal is still open to pleasure boats.

The original pump house that pumped water into the uppermost canal at Chesapeake City now houses the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal Museum and local canal office for the US Army Corps of Engineers. A replica of the original Bethel Lighthouse stands near the museum. The original lighthouse warned ships of their approach to the locks and bridges at Chesapeake City. Modern technology enables the Army Corps of Engineers to monitor canal traffic twenty four hours a day, seven days a week on large screens at their office beside the Chesapeake and Delaware Museum. The US Army Corps of Engineers states on their website that approximately 40 per cent of the ship traffic out of Baltimore passes through the canal. Boaters are permitted to cruise through the canal, and marinas are located at Chesapeake City, Summit Bridge, and Delaware City, and near both ends of the canal.

The banks of the waterway were tow paths in the 19th century, and for the most part these waterside trails remain undeveloped. The only towns of consequence beside the canal in the nineteenth century were Chesapeake City in Maryland, and St. Georges and Delaware City in Delaware. Chesapeake City and St. Georges remain the largest towns on the canal, although developments at Summit Bridge and other areas of Delaware are growing near the canal. The south side of the canal has a gravel road running along its length. The canal divides Chesapeake City into a southern and northern half. There is no road of consequential length along the north bank of the canal. A trail for hiking, biking, and horseback riding along the north side of the canal was recently constructed in Delaware, and there are plans to extend the ends of the trails to Delaware City at the east end and Chesapeake City at the west end. Several wildlife management areas are located along or near the canal. Roadway bridges cross the canal at Chesapeake City, Maryland, Summit, Delaware, St. Georges, Delaware, and Reedy Point near Delaware City, Delaware. A railroad bridge crosses at Kirkwood, Delaware.

S6. Include a bibliography or list of citations for sources used through the document. Discuss the reliability of historical sources of information and briefly discuss how you used them.

Burgess, Robert H., and H. Graham Wood. *Steamboats out of Baltimore*. Cambridge, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1968.

Burgess and Graham were two of a trio of highly respected Chesapeake Bay steamboat historians (The third one, David C. Holly, is discussed below). Burgess served as curator at the Mariners Museum in Newport Virginia, where he had worked for over forty years, retiring in 1978. He had written at least nine books on Chesapeake related topics. Wood's interest in steamboat history is reflected in his forty year volunteer service as the treasurer of the Steamboat Historical Society of America.

“Canal History,” US Army Corps of Engineers, Philadelphia District, Marine Design Center,
<http://www.nap.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/ChesapeakeDelawareCanal/CanalHistory.aspx>.

Much of the history of the canal in S5 is a summary from this US Army Corps of Engineers webpage. The canal is owned and operated by this organization, making their site a reliable source on the history of the canal, especially for the period from 1919, when they took over canal operations, to present day.

Cecil County, Court House Records Collection, Historical Society of Cecil County.

Although the collection is incomplete, the existing documents are official county court records.

Dorsey, Clement. *The General Public Statutory Law and Public Local Law of the state of Maryland, Laws of Maryland, 1831*, *Archives of Maryland Online*, vol. 141,
<http://www.msa.md.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000141/html/am141--1068.html>.

This document from Archives of Maryland Online contains the wording of the law referred to in the text.

Drayton, Daniel. *Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton ... including the Narrative of the Voyage and Capture of the Schooner Pearl*, Boston, New York: B. Marsh, 1854, Making of America Digital Library, University of Michigan, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moa/>.

Through his references to the canal, Drayton shows that the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal figured in the planning for the escape. Drayton also make clear the role Frenchtown, Maryland, a short distance from the entrance to the canal and a transportation link to the Delaware River, had in the planning. Years ago, one historian had erroneously assumed Drayton meant Frenchtown, New Jersey, and other historian had repeated the error without reflection. This would have meant that after the ship passed Philadelphia and dropped the passengers off, and friends would then take them to Philadelphia. Some knowledge of Frenchtown, Maryland and a careful reading of pages 24 and 31 would have prevented the error in the first place. On page 31, Sayres insists on the original agreement to sail north in the bay in order to reach Frenchtown, where his passengers would disembark before the ship entered the canal. Recent histories are correcting the error.

Historical Society of Cecil County Photograph Collection.

Images from the Historical Society of Cecil County (including from this webpage <http://www.cecilhistory.org/chesapeakecity/Delaware%20City/Delaware%20City.html>) were used with permission.

Holly, David C. *Chesapeake Steamboats: Vanishing Fleet*. Centreville, MD: Tidewater Publishers, 1994.

As I had stated above, Burgess and Graham were two of a trio of highly respected Chesapeake Bay steamboat historians. Holly was the third historian in the trio. He was a retired naval officer who began a second career as a college teacher and author. He wrote four books on maritime history related to Chesapeake steamboats.

Gray, Ralph D. *The National Waterway: A History of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, 1769 – 1965*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1967.

Gray is an American history professor and author with an interest in early 19th century transportation. His history of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal is the most detailed history written about the canal.

Larson, Kate Clifford. *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2004.

Larson is a Harriet Tubman scholar who has done extensive work on Underground Railroad activity on the Delmarva Peninsula and in the Chesapeake and Delaware Bay region. She is a consultant for the Harriet Tubman Resource Study of the National Park Service.

Martinet, Simon J., *Martinet's Map of Cecil County Maryland*, [Baltimore: 1858]

The Martinet Map of Cecil County, along with a coordinated name index compiled by the Historical Society of Cecil County, is an invaluable source for historians researching and writing about Cecil County history in the mid-1800s.

Still, William. *Journal C of Station 2, William Still*, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, <http://hsp.org/still-journal-text>.

Still's journal contains information he excluded from his book on the Underground Railroad.

Still, William. *The Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narrative, Letters* Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872.

Still deserves credit for recording the narratives of those who fled slavery and arrived in Philadelphia. He a valuable primary source for studying the Underground Railroad and the experiences of former slaves. As valuable as the source is, there are times when William Still recorded names of people and places incorrectly.

The Maryland Directory, 1882. Baltimore: J. Frank Lewis & Co., 1882.

This primary source featured an ad showing a Baltimore and Philadelphia Steamboat Company, or Ericsson Line, schedule. Although the schedule was several decades after the escapes on the Ericsson Line, it illustrates the vary of ports these steamboats visited on the way up the bay, and the total time between Baltimore and Philadelphia is close to the times Green and Jones spent in transit in the 1850s.

US Army Corps of Engineers, Philadelphia District, Marine Design Center, Chesapeake and Delaware Canal website:

<http://www.nap.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/ChesapeakeDelawareCanal.aspx> .
Photographs from this website were used with permission.

US Department of Commerce, *Distances between United States Ports*, 12th Edition, 2012, <http://www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/nsd/distances-ports/distances.pdf>.

These are the official government statistics for distances between United States ports.

[Baltimore] *American & Commercial Daily Advertiser*, August 13, 1850, May 2, 1853.

[Baltimore] *Sun*, June 1, 1857.

Cecil Democrat, November 1, 1851, April 26, 1856, September 27, 1856, May 2, 1857.

Cecil Whig, January 5, 1856, February 2, 1856.

[Boston] *The Liberator*, June 25, 1858

[Philadelphia] *The North American*, July 29, 1853.