1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: **RANKIN, JOHN, HOUSE**

Other Name/Site Number:

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 6152 Rankin Road Not for publication: N/A

City/Town: Ripley Vicinity:___

State: Ohio County: Brown Code: 015 Zip Code: 45167

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property		Category of Property	
Private:	___	Building(s):	X
Public-Local:	___	District:	___
Public-State:	X	Site:	___
Public-Federal:	___	Structure:	___
		Object:	___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	2	buildings
___	___	sites
___	2	structures
___	___	objects
1	4	Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ____ nomination ____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

______________________________________ ____________________
Signature of Certifying Official Date

____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ____ meets ____ does not meet the National Register criteria.

______________________________________ ____________________
Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

____
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

____ Entered in the National Register
____ Determined eligible for the National Register
____ Determined not eligible for the National Register
____ Removed from the National Register
____ Other (explain): ____

_____________________________ _________________________
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic:	DOMESTIC	Sub:	Single Dwelling
Current:	RECREATION/CULTURE	Sub:	Museum

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: EARLY REPUBLIC: Federal

MATERIALS:
Foundation: STONE
Walls: BRICK
Roof: WOOD/Shingle
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Rev. John Rankin house sits on the crest of a high hill above the Village of Ripley, Ohio with a commanding view of the Ohio River and northern Kentucky. Constructed in 1828, the house is an unadorned one- and one-half story, three-bay brick Federal vernacular-style building with moderately-pitched lateral gable roof and double gable flush chimneys on either end. The house sits nearly at grade on an uncoursed limestone foundation and is laid in Flemish bond brick on the facade or south elevation and common bond brick on secondary and rear elevations. The facade is symmetrical, exhibiting simple double-hung windows with nine-over-six sash flanking an altered Greek Revival portico and doorway. The portico consists of a simple wooden pediment supported by plain square wood columns; the doorway has a rectangular transom. A plain wooden frieze under a shallow boxed eave appears along the main facade and the only other embellishment on this otherwise strictly vernacular structure is the vertically placed brick headers and stretchers above the windows. At the back of the house the roof projects over an open veranda which extends across two-thirds of the rear elevation. The roof extension is supported by square wood posts with simple carved wooden brackets. Windows on secondary and rear elevations are nine-over-six or six-over-six double-hung sash. There are two rear entrances and a third entrance near the north end of the house along the west elevation with direct access to the present kitchen area. Iron wall ties with star motif are found on east and west elevations.

The Rankin house is owned by the State of Ohio and is operated as a state historic site and museum. The plan of the building is thirty-five feet square arranged around a center hallway. On the main floor are four rooms now in use as a parlor (former sitting room) and bedroom (former parlor) at the south end of the house, and a kitchen (former dining room) and dining room (former bedroom) at the north end of the house. Of the two small upstairs rooms, one is in use as a bedroom and the other as a sitting room with glass enclosed wall display cases. Interior woodwork is nearly all original with deep paneled doorways and fluted door frames with corner rosettes on the first floor and simpler, modest woodwork on the second level. In the parlor, the main entrance consists of an eight panel door with transom and some early hardware. Also in this room are recessed cabinets on the west wall with six panel doors above and single panel doors beneath. Brick fireplaces are situated on the outside walls in each of the downstairs rooms. Those in the parlor, dining room, and bedroom have wooden Federal mantles which include fluted corner pilasters rising to fully executed entablatures with some modest detailing. Walls and ceilings are plaster throughout, and simple wooden chair rails appear in each room. Floors are wide board planking.

The Rankin house was purchased by the State of Ohio in 1938 and was renovated and dedicated as a state memorial and museum on June 13, 1948. Today it is operated jointly by the Ohio Historical Society and Ripley Heritage, Inc. to commemorate the work of Rev. John Rankin and Ohio's contribution to the antislavery movement and the Underground Railroad. On display are a number of Rankin's personal items, including the family Bible and pieces of original furniture. The house itself has undergone considerable change over the years. Floor plans and elevations of the structure were drawn by the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1936 and show the house as it was prior to the 1948 renovation (Figures 1-3). A one-story brick kitchen wing situated at the northwest corner of the house is not included in the HABS plans, but it appears on historic photographs and was likely built about the same time as the main house (Photo Attachment 2). Apparently used as a summer kitchen, this wing was entered from the rear porch and, like many other summer kitchens of that period, was not entered directly from the main house itself, but had a service window which opened from the interior dining room. The summer kitchen was taken down some time ago (date unknown) and was not rebuilt as part of the State restoration in 1948.

The main house itself was built in two sections, including the present structure and also a two-bay, one and one-half story brick wing along the east elevation built as additional bedroom space for Rankin's very large family of thirteen children and occasional theological students. Rooms on the second level of the present house were also bedroom studies used by students of Rev. Rankin's seminary. The two sections of the Rankin house were distinctly different from one another in many respects, such as the type of brick work, foundation material, and interior finish. The bedroom wing was removed in the 1948 renovation and was not rebuilt. A three-bay Italianate porch with flat roof and decorative brackets along the main elevation also was taken down in 1948. Architects in charge of the project felt that this porch was "evidently of a later vintage than the original portion of the home," the jigsaw work indicating a late nineteenth century construction. [1] This porch never ran completely across the front of the house, extending only from the current main entrance up to and including the doorway of the bedroom wing (Photo Attachment 1). The current Greek portico decorating the front entrance was applied in the 1948 renovation and was intended to depict the house during its Federal era.

Although historic photographs show mature shade trees around the Rankin house, it is now fully exposed with small clusters of trees and wooded areas some distance from the house. An old well has been rebuilt at the rear of the house and a modern stone water fountain appears along the west elevation. Other early buildings associated with the house included an outhouse and barn. The barn was taken down in 1940 or 1941 and the outhouse removed sometime after the 1948 restoration. The only other structures now on the property are newer storage sheds some distance from the house near the main road and adjacent to the parking lot. These include a concrete block restroom building and a garage/storage area. These sheds, as well as a parking lot, are non-contributing resources. The house and grounds are accessed by automobile via a long, steep road approaching the site from the north. The site also is accessible by foot up a steep flight of steps that lead from the village grid at 4th Street to the home. The original flight of 100 steps was at one time known as the "Hundred Steps", and in more recent times, as the "Liberty Stairway."[2] The stairway started from a stone platform and ascended the hill without additional platforms. Constructed of wood it was in a severe state of dilapidation for many years. Although within the boundary of the nomination, these stairs are considered non-contributing as the upper portion of this "stairway to freedom" was rebuilt probably in the 1950s and the lower section reconstructed within the last decade.

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[1] Sims, Cornelius & Schooley, Architects. "Report on the Restoration of the Dr. Rankin Home, Ripley, Ohio."(Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State Archeological and Historical Society, October 1946).

[2] Felix J. Koch, "Marking the Old 'Abolition Holes'," Ohio Archeological and Historical Society Publications 22 (1913): 312. The exact origin of the term "Liberty Stairway" or the reference to the Rankin Homestead as "Liberty Hill," is unknown. It appears to have been used as early as 1912 at the Ripley centennial celebration, but these patriotic references likely did not come into general use until after the State purchase of the site in 1938, as no such mention has been found in publications or written materials prior to this time.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally: X
Statewide:___ Locally:___

Applicable National Register Criteria: A _X_ B _X_ C___ D___

Criteria Considerations
(Exceptions): A___ B___ C___ D___ E___ F___ G___

NHL Criteria: 1 and 2

NHL Theme(s): II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements
2. Reform Movements

National Register Areas of Significance: Social/Humanitarian
Ethnic Heritage--Black

Period(s) of Significance: 1828-1865

Significant Dates:

Significant Person(s): Rankin, John

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Unknown

NHL Comparative Categories: XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements
D. Abolitionism

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Rankin House is nationally significant under Criteria 1 and 2 for its important associations with the Underground Railroad in Ohio and with Presbyterian minister and educator Rev. John Rankin who is notable among abolitionists and who is reputed as one of the Ohio's first and most active “conductors" on the Underground Railroad. John Rankin worked ceaselessly for the antislavery cause in America for nearly half a century, from the time of his entry into the Presbyterian ministry in 1817 until the close of the Civil War in 1865. Rankin's contributions to the antislavery movement are many and varied. His authorship of the Letters on American Slavery had the most far reaching impact. First published in book form in 1826, the volume was among the first clearly articulated antislavery views printed west of the Appalachians. In ensuing years, Rankin's fame spread nationwide and the work was put through several editions by the American Anti-Slavery Society. By the early 1830s, Letters on American Slavery had become standard reading among abolitionists both in the East and West.

John Rankin's contemporaries have tended to recognize his contributions to American abolitionism far more than later historians. While much of his work in the critical decades of the 1830s and 1840s was local in nature, for instance, his pivotal role in the Ripley Anti-Slavery Society, Rankin is also counted among the founders of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, and he served for a time as an itinerant lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society in the region of southwestern Ohio. Noted not only for his role as organizer and public speaker, Rankin was also an accomplished and prolific writer. In addition to his Letters on American Slavery, Rankin published a number of theological, temperance, and antislavery tracts throughout a lengthy and distinguished career. Many of these works were published by the American Tract Society of which Rankin was founder and president for more than twenty years. Rev. John Rankin also was the founder and unquestioned leader of the independent Free Presbyterian Church of America established as a separatist sect in 1847 after more than two decades of struggle to convince both Old School and New School Presbyterians to assume an antislavery position within the church.

Largely as a result of his Letters on American Slavery, but also because of his activism for the cause, John Rankin was known and revered by such national leaders within the antislavery movement as Theodore Weld, James Birney, Elizur Wright, Jr., and William Lloyd Garrison. It was perhaps no exaggeration that among his contemporaries Rankin was often referred to as the "father of abolitionism" and the "Martin Luther of the cause."[1] Yet it was not his public persona that had the greatest impact on the antislavery movement in the first half of the nineteenth century, at least in terms of human lives, but rather his work on the Underground Railroad in Ripley, Ohio. Rankin’s commitment to the runaway slave established his reputation at an early time as a folk hero of sorts in southwestern Ohio, a status enhanced by the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's book Uncle Tom's Cabin in which Eliza Harris, an escaped slave seeking refuge with the John Rankin family, was immortalized for generations of readers. For forty-three years, from 1822 to 1865, John Rankin, along with his wife and children, assisted hundreds of escaped slaves in their trek to freedom from the South, northward into Canada.

After its construction in 1828, the Rankin House, which sat high on a hill behind the village of Ripley overlooking the Ohio River and northern Kentucky, was considered one of the "first stations" on the Underground Railroad and safe haven for fugitive slaves as they took their first steps onto the free soils

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[1] William Birney, James G. Birney and His Times, (New York: Negro University Press, 1890), 168.

of Ohio. The site of the Rankin home in subsequent years was aptly named, "Liberty Hill."[2] It was purchased by the State of Ohio in 1938 and has been maintained as a state historic site since that time. It should be noted that there may be potential for archaeological information here dating at least to the period of the early nineteenth century.

Much of the historical literature on the antislavery movement in the decades preceding the Civil War focuses on such prominent New England and east coast abolitionists as William Lloyd Garrison, Gerrit Smith, and the Tappan brothers, individuals who vehemently took up the cause of immediate emancipation beginning in the early 1830s. Yet, some of the most virulent antislavery campaigns were carried out not in New England, New York, or Philadelphia, but in the states of the Old Northwest, Ohio being the most prominent among them in this regard.[3] Together with the region of Western New York, which came to be known as the “Burned Over District,” sections of the Old Northwest furnished much of the strength and enthusiasm of the religious revivals that swept like wildfire throughout the country in the first half of the nineteenth century. Dubbed by later historians as the “Second Great Awakening,” this resurgence of revivalistic preaching invigorated many religious sects and denominations which had been languishing in terms of numbers since the period of the American Revolution.[4] The reform impulse which so thoroughly pervaded American society in the antebellum period, in fact, had its roots in this evangelical fervor which began in New England in the 1790s and gained momentum in the South and West particularly in the decade of the 1820s under the influence of such persuasive leaders as Presbyterian-Congregationalist evangelist Charles Grandison Finney.

Charles Finney spread his gospel through revival meetings across the North and West in the years before the Civil War. His new brand of evangelism replaced old Calvinist concepts of predestination and depravity with the notion that human beings could effect their own salvation and redemption. Yet, while personal salvation was achievable, it nevertheless required immediate and complete repentance. This new theology precipitated a number of evangelical trends, among them the increasingly popular concepts of disinterested benevolence and volunteerism, and the related doctrines of perfectionism and millenialism, both of which posited a belief not only in human perfectibility but ultimately in the creation of the kingdom of God on earth. As a consequence, the evangelical message of the first half

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[2] As mentioned above, it is not certain when the term “Liberty Hill” was first used in relation to the Rankin homestead. Although referenced as such in 1912 as part of the Ripley centennial celebration, it was not until after the State’s purchase of the site in 1938 that the term began to appear in written materials (newspaper articles, promotional brochures, etc.). As late as 1913, in an article by Felix J. Koch entitled “Marking the ‘Old Abolitionist Holes,’” the term “Liberty Hill” is not used, and although the historic stairway is mentioned, it is not referred to as the “Liberty Stairway” but as the “100 steps.” Ohio Archeological and Historical Society Publications, V. 22 (1913), 313.

[3] The states of the Old Northwest included Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Being third among all the states in population, Ohio dominated society and politics in the Old Northwest. In 1840, Ohio cast more electoral votes than Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan combined. Ohio was also the northwestern state with the longest history of antislavery activity. Abolitionism and religious intensity were especially strong in Ohio’s northeastern counties, a region known as the Western Reserve. Vernon L. Volpe, Forlorn Hope of Freedom: The Liberty Party in the Old Northwest, 1838-1848 (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1990), xix.

[4] Volpe, Forlorn Hope of Freedom , 8.

of the nineteenth century was not only that of religious salvation but societal reform, and many who fell under the influence of Charles Finney and others like him turned to such causes as abolitionism and temperance with vigor and commitment.[5]

One such Finney convert was Theodore Dwight Weld, a still young, but fervent, abolitionist, who came to Ohio to study for the ministry at the Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati in 1833. Lane Seminary was a very recently established theological institution over which noted New England minister Lyman Beecher had been installed as president. Lane's location in Cincinnati was ideal. The city was destined for phenomenal growth in its position on the Ohio River as gateway to the West and Southwest, and it was here that men like Weld and Beecher saw the future of the country. Although Lyman Beecher carried a national reputation at the time, the Lane faculty was less notable, but not so its students. Of the forty members of the first theological class, all were over twenty-six years of age, many had attended other colleges, others had served as agents of benevolent societies, and the vast majority were natives of New England or upstate New York, "a number having come from the region around Auburn, Rochester, and Utica, New York, where the embers of Finney's great revival still glowed hot."[6] More than half the students also had been enrolled previously at Oneida Institute, a "manual labor" educational institution at which Weld had become a dominant figure, and Weld's influence remained paramount among the students at Lane Seminary.

According to one of his biographers, in Lane's formative years, Theodore Weld was the only student with "forthright abolitionist convictions." While some others voiced antislavery sympathies, most favored the gradualist methods of the American colonizationists.[7] However, under Weld's influence many students were aroused to greater commitment on behalf of both slave and freeman. Weld and other Lane students established an abolition society at the school and they developed antislavery lectures and performed charitable work within Cincinnati's black community, all toward the end of achieving a greater degree of social equality for free blacks in that city. Weld, in particular, was a man endowed with considerable charismatic powers. In 1834 he organized a series of antislavery lectures at Lane, known as the Lane Debates, and used his powers of persuasion to convince students and faculty of that institution not only that abolition of slavery was essential, but that "immediate" emancipation should be the rallying cry behind the cause.

In some respects, Cincinnati was a Southern city on free soil during this period and one with strong commercial ties to the South. As with much of the region of southern Ohio, Cincinnati seethed with pent-up prejudices, especially strong here because of the city's sizeable black population. Hearing word of the debates and agitated by the students' work within the black community, citizens pressured college officials to put a stop to the students' blatant activism. Ultimately, however, when faced with the choice of expulsion or restrictive regulations on their behavior, the majority of involved students resigned rather than compromise their principles.
Living in nearby Ripley, Ohio, the Reverend John Rankin learned of the coming debates in Cincinnati and he and other Presbyterian ministers of the region attended. Rankin identified easily with the gospel

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[5] John R. McKivigan, The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 19-20; Robert William Fogel, Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 254-264; Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War (New York: Harper & Row, 1962 edition) 41, 490-491.

[6] Benjamin P. Thomas, Theodore Weld: Crusader for Freedom (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1950), 43-54; Lawrence Thomas Lesick, The Lane Rebels: Evangelicalism and Antislavery in Antebellum America, Studies in Evangelicalism No. 2 (Metuchen, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1980).

[7] Thomas, Theodore Weld, 70.

of immediatism as he had been preaching such a concept for many years. It was, however, Weld's evangelical fervor that attracted Rankin most and drew him more fully into active participation within the abolitionist movement. The conclusions drawn from the Lane Debates were simple but unconditional: that slavery was sinful both in principle and practice; that blame for slavery should be placed squarely upon the individual; that slavery should be repented and rejected immediately, as all other sins; and that slavery was a national sin and the nonslaveholder who tolerated or defended its existence was as guilty of maintaining it as the slaveholder.[8]

In the midst of the debates, John Rankin spoke out on behalf of the Lane students, articulating such concepts in a lengthy and scathing treatise published in the local abolitionist press and also reprinted in William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator. Rankin's views were uncompromising, calling slavery "one of the blackest sins that ever stained human character." He considered slavery not simply a social ill, but an individual sin. When moral suasion proved ineffective, he justified the extreme actions of abolitionists by the magnitude of the evil. It was in such statements as the one cited below that Rankin justified his work as an abolitionist and, perhaps most especially, his illegal activities on behalf of the fugitive slave on the Underground Railroad.

> Slavery presents such enormity in cruelty and crime that larger allowances should be made for the extremes of abolitionists than for those of any other class of men. 'Oppression maketh a wise man mad.' Whether he endures it himself or sees it inflicted on others. This is the only subject upon which madness is considered as evidence of wisdom."[9]

After leaving Lane Seminary, Theodore Weld began an abolition lecture circuit which brought him first to Rankin's home community of Ripley, Ohio, just fifty miles upriver from Cincinnati. Rankin and other newly energized abolitionists observed Weld as he lectured in their towns and churches, watching him apply the methods of evangelical revivalism to the antislavery campaign. Following Weld's example, Rankin and others helped form antislavery societies throughout the region and, in the process, their abolitionism became more clearly defined. Those who called themselves abolitionists now belonged to abolition societies, they believed that slavery was a sin, that slaves should be freed immediately, unconditionally, without expatriation or compensation to owners, and they subscribed (at least theoretically) to the doctrine of racial equality.[10]

Following the Lane controversy and responding to an invitation from the founder of the Western Reserve's Oberlin College, Theodore Weld and other former Lane students enrolled at that new institution in 1835. Weld, in particular, proved instrumental in bringing Charles Finney to Oberlin, and the small community soon became one of Ohio's centers of abolitionism. Together, Finney and Weld converted many Ohioans to the cause and laid the groundwork for a state abolition convention held at Putnam in 1835 and the creation of the Ohio Antislavery Society, an affiliate of the American Anti-Slavery Society established two years previous in 1833. By 1836, some 120 affiliated and non-

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[8] Larry G. Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin: Early Ohio Anti-Slavery Leader" (University of Iowa: PH.D. diss., 1976), 97-99.

[9] John Rankin, "Review of the Statement of the Faculty of Lane Seminary in Relation to the Recent Difficulties in that Institution." Ohio Historical Society VFM 2137.

[10] Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 99.

affiliated antislavery societies in Ohio claimed about 10,000 members; just two years later those numbers had nearly tripled.

The great bulk of these abolition societies were found on the Western Reserve, with central and southwestern Ohio providing the remainder.[11] The disparity in numbers stemmed largely from the fact that the Western Reserve and the Lake Region of Ohio proved more hospitable to antislavery activity than the rest of the state. This was due in large part to the cultural differences between northern and southern regions of Ohio. In the early years, the Old Northwest had been dominated by transplanted southerners who settled the hills and valleys of Southern Ohio. Among this group were those who had no special hatred for blacks, and who even risked social ostracism by opposing slavery while in the South. But most newcomers had been raised with the institution, and continued to defend it while yet living on the free soils of Ohio.

There were anti-slavery settlers during this period as well. During the early years of statehood, entire communities of Quakers also came to Ohio from New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and the Carolinas. They settled such communties as Mt. Pleasant, Salem, Lisbon, and other towns mostly in southwestern Ohio and brought with them a message of pacifisim and opposition to slavery. Though their influence in the antislavery cause was considerable, their numbers were small in relation to the overall population. [12]

In contrast, among the more conspicuous of emigrants to northern Ohio were those of New England ancestry, either those who came directly from New England or those who were once removed from Yankee communities in western New York.[13] They had arrived in the years between 1810 and 1850 at a time when improvements in transportation added thousands of settlers to the State's already diverse cultural landscape. As Ohio's social divisions grew, differences between north and south often flared up quite dramatically. For example, anti-abolitionist mobs were most common in counties bordering the Ohio River, while opposition to the state's discriminatory Black Laws existed mostly on the Western Reserve and in the Lake region.[14]

Whether in the more hostile environment of southern Ohio or in the more tolerant counties of the Western Reserve, in the years before the Civil War, Ohio's abolitionist strongholds often were also places of extensive Underground Railroad activity. The Ordinance of 1787 forbid slavery north of the Ohio River, and so the state became a tempting haven for fugitive slaves from an early time. Some of the settlers who migrated to Ohio from the South came with powerful antislavery sentiments and a fervent desire to make their homes in a free soil state. As settlements of antislavery proponents became more numerous in southern Ohio, the north bank of the Ohio River eventually sprouted several "reception" centers on the Underground Railroad and routes of escape moved in a zigzag fashion northward to the Great Lakes and beyond into Canada.

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[11] Volpe, Forlorn Hope of Freedom, 12; George W. Knepper, Ohio and Its People (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1989), 209.

[12] Knepper, Ohio and Its People, 174.

[13] Volpe, Forlorn Hope of Freedom., 4-5.

[14] Ibid, xix, xxi, 4.

Primarily because of its location bordering the slave states, Ohio was said to be "by far the most highly successful of all the states involved [on the Underground Railroad]."[15] According to Wilbur H. Siebert, one of the earliest historians of the Underground Railroad in Ohio, there were no less than twenty-three ports of entry for runaways along the Ohio riverfront.

> Thirteen of these admitted the slaves from the two hundred and seventy-five miles of Kentucky shore on our southwest, while the other ten received those from the one hundred and fifty miles of Virginia soil on our southeast. From these initial depots the Ohio routes ran in zigzag lines, trending generally in a northeastern direction, linking station with station in a mysterious bond till a place of deportation was reached on Lake Erie.[16]

Five major outlets for the runaway slave along Lake Erie included Toledo, Sandusky, Cleveland, Fairport Harbor (near Painesville), and Ashtabula Harbor. Elsewhere, "almost without exception," towns and villages with Quaker settlements, as well as communities of Covenanters, Wesleyan Methodists, and Free Presbyterians served as stations on the Underground Railroad at one time or another in their antebellum history. Mob activity, precipitated by the attempted arrest of "underground passengers," often provided the best documented evidence of a community's inclusion within the Underground Railroad network. Among other places (including Ripley), such incidents were reported in Columbus, Granville, Bellefontaine, Marysville, Toledo, Marion, Troy, Dayton, Mechanicsburg, Putnam, Wooster, and many other of the estimated 225 or more places at which Ohio's underground stations were said to be located.[17]

Although many of the state's Underground Railroad centers have achieved fame, often more from legend than actual fact, in Brown County the reputation of Ripley as Ohio's "black hole of abolitionism" is well documented and unquestioned.[18] The town and its bevy of Underground Railroad men and women perhaps eclipsed the notoriety of Cincinnati and the avid antislavery work of noted abolitionist Levi Coffin. Ripley was located within the old Northwest Territory on the north shore of the Ohio River at the southern edge of the Virginia Military District. These lands had been set aside as land in lieu of payment to Virginia's Revolutionary War veterans. According to John P. Parker, a noted African-American abolitionist of Ripley, "these wild lands were the only place where the Virginia or Southern masters could take their slaves and free them, without any liability to themselves." Gathered in the “District,” side-by-side with proslavery advocates, were a growing number of antislavery men from North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.[19]

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[15] Larry Gara, “The Underground Railroad: Legends and Reality,” in Timeline 5 No. 4 (1988): 20.

[16] Wilbur H. Siebert, “The Underground Railroad in Ohio” in Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society Quarterly 3 No. 2 (1895): 59.

[17] Ibid, 59-61; Wilbur H. Siebert, “The Underground Railroad for the Liberation of Fugitive Slaves” in American Historical Association Annual Report for 1895 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 401.

[18] Stuart Seely Sprague, ed. His Promised Land: The Autobiography of John P. Parker Former Slave and Conductor on the Underground Railroad (New York: Norton, forthcoming 1996), 53.

[19] Ibid., 54.

The present site of Ripley was founded on a portion of the 1,000 acres of Survey No. 418 of the Virginia Military District purchased by Colonel James Poage of Staunton, Virginia. Said to be opposed to slavery, Poage was determined to live in a free state and settled on his claim as early as 1804. Ripley itself was incorporated as the village of Staunton in 1812. The name was changed February 23, 1816 in honor of Brigadier General Eleazar Wheelock Ripley for his gallantry in the War of 1812.[20]

In the years before the railroads made their way extensively into Ohio, Ripley was one of the great Ohio River shipping points in southern Ohio, located just fifty miles upriver from Cincinnati. The village lies in a picturesque setting on uneven ground with a river frontage of more than a mile, divided into east and west by Red Oak Creek. The town faces the river and its back nestles up against a high hill about 400 feet above the river bank. The river here is nearly one-half mile wide and proved to be a deep water landing, especially important to the town in the steamboat era. Although Ripley's most colorful period began with the first steamboats, the town flourished as a commercial river port even in the flatboat era.

Today the village of Ripley includes a large historic district of residential and commercial buildings, some of which date as early as 1816. Front Street is probably the most notable section within the historic part of town being comprised of four to five long blocks of elegant homes, several of them once owned by antislavery men who worked as conductors on the Underground Railroad out of Ripley. Various monuments erected during the village's Centennial Week in 1912 commemorate Ripley's noted abolitionists and "railroaders." The Liberty Monument at the foot of Main Street on the Ohio River remembers local antislavery figure Rev. John Rankin and others, such as Col. James Poage, Thomas McCague, Thomas Collins, Dr. Alfred Beasley, Theodore Collins, Samuel Kirkpatrick, John Parker, U.S. Senator Alexander Campbell, and others outside of Ripley who served the fugitive slave on connecting routes north at Russellville, Decatur, and Sardinia.[21]

A number of those remembered, including John Rankin, at one time had their homes along Front Street and were among the first to receive fugitive slaves as they stepped from boats onto the free soil of Ohio. In his narrated memoirs recorded in the late 1880s, Ripley abolitionist John Parker recalled a few of the old homes still standing at the time which had been places of refuge for the runaway.

> Facing the river on the corner of [Front] Street and Mulberry stands the old Collins house, a two storied brick house around which are gathered many of the dramatic episodes of this period. At the top of the river bank, its two doors facing two different streets, made it easy access to the fleeing fugitives. The doors unlocked, lighted candle on the table, many times I have slipped into this room, surrounded by a motley group of scared fugitives. Arousing the man of the house, he would quickly feed the crowd, then take them out the back way through the alley, over the hills to Red Oak or Russellville. If this old house could only bring back its shadows, they would be many and mingled.

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[20] Eliese Bambach Stivers, Ripley, Ohio: Its History and Families (Ripley, Ohio: Eliese Bambach Stivers, 1965), 1-2.

[21] Stivers, Ripley, Ohio, 69.

> Further down on Front Street is the [Thomas] McCague house with its narrow high stoop, up whose steps many strange men and women went gently tapping on the door. The cellar and the garret have been filled with breathless fugitives.[22]

The true fortress and home to the fugitive slave in Ripley, however, was far from Front Street and the river. This was the house of John Rankin, perched high on a hill behind the town. Even today, Rankin is by far the most celebrated of all of Ripley's abolitionists. This Presbyterian minister's hilltop home served as a beacon to escaping slaves, allegedly including "Eliza" whose journey across the ice-clogged Ohio River is immortalized in Harriet Beecher Stowe's book, Uncle Tom's Cabin. Of Rankin's home Parker commented:

> At times attacked on all sides by masters seeking their slaves, [John Rankin and his sons] beat back their assailant, and held its threshold unsullied. A lighted candle stood as beacon which could be seen from across the river, and like the north star was the guide to the fleeing slave. In this eagle's nest, Rev. John Rankin and his sons held forth during many stormy years, and only left the old home when their work was well and lastingly done.[23]

Rankin built this home in 1828 for a family that would eventually number thirteen of his own children, nine boys and four girls, and a young mulatto girl whom he and his wife raised as their own. The Rankin's first home in Ripley was along the river at 222 Front Street, near the homes of other abolitionists. The house, now subdivided into three apartments, remains standing today. Rankin actually built this very large house in three sections, living in one-third of the house and renting out the others. The family remained on Front Street for six years, eventually moving to a farm on the hillside behind Ripley, says Rankin, because he "felt that town was not the best place to bring up my boys."[24] In the original purchase of 1828, the site of the new home was set on sixty-five and a half acres of unimproved ground.

> The land was thickly set with the best of timber and the soil was excellent. I at once put up a log house that would do for a stable and moved into it. I sold a third of my house in town to put up a brick house and a short time had it done. I bought a yoke of oxen and a cart, employed men to cut wood and my oldest boy hauled it to town. I sold it for one dollar a cord. This was low but other things were equally so. I soon had the ground all fenced and most of it cleared, ready for farming.[25]

The new home was a small and unassuming brick structure, one and one half stories high with lateral gable roof. From its vantage point above the town it dominated the entire Ohio-Kentucky valley, as it does today.

From this site atop Liberty Hill, John Rankin aided perhaps as many as 2,000 escaped slaves in their flight from the South, northward into Canada. Though, by necessity, the work was secretive, Rankin's home nonetheless was known far and wide by escaped slaves and slave catchers alike. Rankin's notoriety is evidenced, for instance, by claims that during the period of his antislavery activities the

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[22] Sprague, His Promised Land, 51-52.

[23] Ibid., ii, 52.

[24] John Rankin, Abolitionist: The Life of Rev. John Rankin Written by Himself in his 80th Year (Huntington, West Virginia: Appalachian Press, Inc., 1978), 41.

[25] Ibid., 41-42.

house was under constant surveillance and that, especially after 1830, bounties in excess of $2,500 were offered for his life by Kentucky slaveowners. Rankin himself noted in his autobiography that on more than one occasion "men lay around my house at night to murder me."[26]

Rankin did not work alone within the town of Ripley, but with a "band of benevolent men" who committed their time and resources and safety on behalf of the escaped slave. Ripley itself had become so notorious as a haven for the fugitive slave in the antebellum period that, according to Rankin himself, slave holders had at one time threatened to burn down the whole town, though ironically during the Civil War "the rebels were not permitted to fire a gun at it."[27]

The operation of the Underground Railroad throughout all of Brown County and adjacent counties in the period before the Civil War, in fact, aroused bitter animosity on the part of Kentucky slaveholders against those who were believed to assist the slaves in their flight to freedom. At an 1838 antislavery meeting in Sardinia, for instance, a committee presented a report stating "that for more than a year past there had been an unusual degree of hatred manifested by the slave-hunters and slaveholders toward the Abolitionists of Brown County, and that rewards varying from $500 to $2,500 had been repeatedly offered by different persons for the abduction or assassination of "railroad" men in Sardinia, Ripley, Russellville, and Adams County."[28]

Aside from his own written reminiscences and those of friends and family, little survives to document John Rankin's Underground Railroad activity. Yet, there is little doubt that Rankin, his wife, and children were responsible for aiding hundreds of fugitive slaves during a period spanning more than forty years, from the early 1820s until the end of the Civil War. Ripley was one of the first towns in southern Ohio to receive runaways, and Rankin's home was the initial station for Brown County. Whether myth or fact, the story is repeated in numerous sources that at night a lantern hung in one of the windows of the Rankin home to serve as a beacon to fugitive slaves who were ready to cross, or were crossing, the Ohio River. Such accounts may likely be true as another "conductor" on the Underground Railroad out of Ripley, John Parker, has noted in his narrated reminiscences that at other homes of abolitionists in Ripley "the door was always ajar, and the candle in the room lighted and waiting to welcome any and all who entered."[29]

John Rankin likely harbored escaped slaves from his earliest days in Ripley, although that activity increased once the family moved from Front Street to their house on the hill above the town. In his autobiography Rankin states, "I kept a depot on the Underground Railway at which many passengers entered for Canada." Whole families, parents and children, were sheltered under his roof, "as many as twelve at a time on some occasions."[30] Though the term Underground Railroad is clouded in obscurity, Rankin had his own explanation for its origin. The Underground Railroad was so called, he said,

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[26] Ibid., 60.

[27] Ibid., 59-60.

[28] Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Ohio (Columbus, Ohio: Henry Howe & Son, 1891), I:314.

[29] Sprague, His Promised Land, 52; Paul R. Grim, "The Rev. John Rankin, Early Abolitionist" in The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly 46 (1937): 236).

[30] Rankin, Abolitionist, 56 and 59; Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 206 and 301.

"because they who took passage on it disappeared from public view as really as if they had gone into the ground. After the fugitive slaves entered a depot on that road, no trace of them could be found."[31]

Rankin's home was only an overnight stop on the line and slaves were secreted away in the house, barn or other nearby structures until they could be sent on to the homes of other antislavery men farther north. Early on, runaways were taken from the Rankin home to that of John B. Mahan at Sardinia, about twenty-one miles north. In later years, most escapees were brought only four miles and hidden in the Red Oak Presbyterian Church (National Register of Historic Places, 6-17-82) with another noted abolitionist, Rev. James Gilliland. In fact, a number of the connecting depots out of Ripley were secretly maintained by Rankin's friends and colleagues within the Presbytery of Chillicothe (later the Presbytery of Ripley). The western route ran northward through Russellville and Sardinia and then on to Lynchburg, Hillsboro and Greenfield or Wilmington. The eastern route out of Ripley led through Red Oak and Decatur to Winchester in Adams County.[32] Upon leaving Brown County, escaped slaves secretly were passed from one depot to another throughout the north until they arrived in Canada. This seemed incredible to John Rankin who marveled at the total absence of structure or organization to the system. Underground Railroad lines and networks were formed without general consensus; there were no secret societies organized nor secret oaths taken, nor promises of secrecy demanded. "And yet there were no betrayals." Antislavery men, he commented, "were actuated by a sense of humanity and right and, of course, were true to one another."[33]

Among the many anecdotes and tales which have survived about slaves who were aided by John Rankin and his family, the best known is the story of the young black woman Eliza who, with infant child in arms, is said to have crossed the Ohio River at Ripley on blocks of floating ice. The true story, though less dramatic than the fictional account, was related directly by John Rankin to the young Harriet Beecher Stowe years before she incorporated the story into her famous work, Uncle Tom's Cabin, in 1852. Lyman Beecher, then president of Lane Theological Seminary in Cincinnati, together with his family frequently visited the Rankin's with whom they were on good terms. During a meeting of the Cincinnati Presbyterian Synod at Ripley in 1838, Mrs. Stowe, her husband, and her father (the Rev. Beecher) were guests of the Rankin's and it was at this time that the story was related. Harriet Beecher Stowe kept the memory of Eliza for years before weaving it into her novel. Once published, the book caused an immediate sensation throughout the country and assisted perhaps more than anything else in the years before the Civil War in advancing the antislavery cause and spreading the gospel of abolitionism to the general public.[34]

There is an anecdote which states that after the Civil War, Henry Ward Beecher was asked, "Who abolished slavery?" He is said to have answered, "Rev. John Rankin and his sons did it."[35] Though a humorous exaggeration, the response is indicative of the powerful influence held by Rankin in Ohio and Kentucky, especially vis-a-vis his undaunting aid to the fugitive slave. Rankin was "a man of

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[31] Andrew Ritchie, The Soldier, the Battle, and the Victory in the Anti-Slavery Cause (Cincinnati: Western Tract and Book Society, 1868), 96-97.

[32] Grim, "The Rev. John Rankin," 328.

[33] Ritchie, The Soldier, the Battle, and the Victory, 96.

[34] Grim, "The Rev. John Rankin," 240; Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 207-208.

[35] William Birney, James G. Birney and His Times (New York: Negro University Press, 1890; reprint, 1969), 168-171.

judgment, perseverance, piety, and strong character and was respected by Beecher who knew him intimately and other of his contemporaries."[36]

John Rankin's antislavery reputation reached its highest stature during his years in Ripley, from 1822 to 1865. But it was those formative years before coming to Ohio that shaped his philosophies and his commitment to the cause. John Rankin was born in Jefferson County, Tennessee on February 4, 1793. His ancestors were Scottish Presbyterians who first came to America via Ireland in 1724. His grandfather, Thomas Rankin, was raised near Carlisle, Pennsylvania in the years before the American Revolution. Thomas fought in that war and later sold the family farm for what proved to be worthless Continental currency. Reduced to poverty, he left Pennsylvania and settled in the wilds of Tennessee. Thomas Rankin's sons had also fought in the Revolutionary War. Richard, the father of John Rankin, worked as a blacksmith in Pennsylvania and after the war he moved to Augusta County, Virginia where he worked at his trade under the employ of Samuel Steele whose daughter he married and with whom he had twelve children, one dying after birth. After the birth of their first child, they too struck out for the frontier, eventually settling in Jefferson County, Tennessee where Richard continued to work as a blacksmith and farmer and raise a family.[37]

Young John Rankin and his siblings were taught by their parents who had little formal education, but they kept a library of books including the Bible, works by Scottish theologians, and some historical volumes. John learned his Presbyterianism also from his parents and received much of his moral education from his mother. Jane Rankin was "a woman of remarkable intellectual culture for one brought up on the frontier. Born and raised in the slave state of Virginia, she was a militant and open opponent of slavery and was the source of antislavery views for all her children."[38]

From his earliest recollections, John Rankin had serious thoughts on the subject of religion. His spiritual fervor was affected in no small part by the religious revivals that spread across the Tennessee and Kentucky frontiers early in the nineteenth century. He struggled for a sense of spiritual peace as a young boy, and while still young he decided to enter the ministry. He spent the remainder of his years as an adolescent improving and preparing himself for his calling. At the age of twenty, John attended school and received tutoring for a time and later attended Washington College at Jonesboro, Tennessee where he also studied privately for the ministry under the tutelage of Rev. Samuel Doak, an avowed abolitionist. Though at times facing severe financial hardship, Rankin finished his studies. In 1816, he married Jane Lowry, granddaughter of Rev. Doak, and their first son was born. The next year Rankin graduated from college and obtained his license to preach within the Presbyterian church. He began his ministry at the age of twenty-four by supplying vacant pulpits each Sabbath, but his willingness even at this early age to express his opposition to slavery quickly created problems for him. Rankin and his family were subsequently compelled to move to a free state where he might preach without censure.[39]

"Being opposed to slavery," said Rankin, "I determined to leave my native state," and in 1817 Rankin and his small family headed for Ohio. They made the harrowing journey through the Cumberland Mountains and Rankin earned money by preaching along the way, stopping first in Lexington, Kentucky. Fate seemed to slow the journey to Ohio, however, as weather and other circumstances detained them near Paris, Kentucky for nearly four years, where he served as pastor to the Concord Presbyterian Church. Rankin may not have stayed in Kentucky had he not inadvertently stumbled upon

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Rankin, Abolitionist, 3-5.

[38] Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 5.

[39] Ibid., 7-13.

what proved to be an avid antislavery settlement. In the years before he came to the Concord parish, this small religious community had taken the lead in establishing a branch of the Kentucky Abolition Society. Rankin fell willingly and enthusiastically into the work of this organization. His years in Kentucky subsequently were a time of growth and maturity both as preacher and abolitionist.

He became an experienced minister, confident in his role as the pastor of a congregation and as a responsible member of a presbytery. He grew confident in his abilities as an antislavery advocate, preaching frequently against slavery, teaching slaves when possible, and working with others in the Kentucky Abolition Society. When he decided to leave Kentucky he was twenty eight years old, the father of four children, vigorous in health, and confident of his abilities. He moved his family to Ohio in order to flee the oppression of a slave state, but he had no intention of fleeing the cause of the slave.[40]

John Rankin migrated out of Kentucky for the same reason he had left his native state of Tennessee -- his opposition to slavery and his frustrations over the inadequacies of moral suasion to effect change within the slave states. From an early time, antislavery was a major theme in his life and his antislavery principles provided the dominant influence in many of his major life decisions. Rankin's antislavery journey covered more than a half century of his long life. Coming to the end of his formative years in Tennessee and Kentucky, he arrived in Ohio "a seasoned and mature antislavery leader" and within just two years he produced his most notable work, Letters on American Slavery, in which he took a highly moral and uncompromising position against slavery.

Rankin crossed the icy waters of the Ohio River on New Years Day, 1822, entering into a state just beginning to emerge from frontier status. Ripley, itself, was still a small frontier river town of slightly over 400 residents with a reputation for immorality and vice. Yet, it was soon to evolve into a major commercial port on the Ohio River with far reaching notoriety as a center of antislavery sentiment. Rankin received two appointments upon his arrival, one at the First Presbyterian Church in Ripley and the other about eight miles north at the Straight Creek Presbyterian Church. He ministered to both congregations for seven years after which he gave the whole of his energies to the church at Ripley and to planting new churches in other Brown County settlements --at Russellville, Decatur and other locations. Rankin's missionary work resulted in the founding of as many as eight churches in Brown County and vicinity, while at the same time his own church prospered, growing in twenty-four years from thirty-six members to two hundred and twenty.[41]

Rankin also started Sabbath schools and temperance societies and served as president of the Ripley Abolition Society and Ripley College. The latter institution had been organized by the citizens of Ripley about 1830. Rankin served as its only president and gave much time and effort to advance its interests. Ulysses S. Grant, then a young boy living in nearby Georgetown, spent a term at Ripley College in preparation for West Point. The school failed within a few years for lack of endowment and a cholera epidemic which scattered both faculty and students. However, the institution continued on as an academy for a number of years under Rankin's guidance. Not surprisingly, the principles of freedom and abolition were emphasized at the school. Rankin later started a Female Seminary on his farm, but that institution also experienced a brief existence. A building was said to have been constructed adjacent to his hillside house for the seminary women, but there is no clear documentary or physical evidence of the existence of such a structure. It is known however, that Rankin's home was frequently full of students, both white and black, to whom he taught theology and the classical subjects. From his home on the hill overlooking Ripley, Rankin prepared two of his sons, other relatives, and a number of

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[40] Ibid., 18-31, 35-36.

[41] Rankin, Abolitionist, 25 and 32; Grim, "The Rev. John Rankin," 242.

local men for the ministry.[42]

Rankin's livelihood depended upon his ministry and he was passionate about his redemptive mission. Yet, this incredibly energetic and committed individual made the antislavery cause the center of his life and the primary goal toward which he strived for years. Rankin wrote and lectured extensively on the subject. He constructed his writings and lectures generally around three points: 1) the opening words of the Declaration of Independence, 2) the belief, supported by the Bible, that all men are created of one blood, and 3) that all men should either do their own work or pay those who do it for them.[43] Rankin's most notable literary achievement was his Letters on American Slavery written in 1824 at the very outset of his career as an abolitionist in Ripley, Ohio. The writing of the Letters was precipitated by the shocking news received by Rankin that his brother Thomas had become a slave holder in Middlebrook, Virginia. Rankin composed the material over a period of nine months as a series of letters to Thomas on the subject of slavery. Rather than sending them by post, he determined to publish them in a new abolitionist newspaper in Ripley called The Castigator. On August 17, 1824, the first of a series of twenty-one letters appeared in the paper. "I argued the wrong of slavery to a great extent [in these letters]," said Rankin. "The arguments were all my own, for I had no books on the subject to guide me."[44]

It is not certain when Rankin decided to issue the letters in book form. He may have planned their publication from the outset, or perhaps after noting their reception by the public as they appeared in The Castigator. He admitted that a "few friends" desired him to reproduce the work. Rankin had no money to finance the printing, however, so he allowed the paper's publisher, David Ammen, to rent one-third of his house on Front Street at $50 a year to pay for the printing of one thousand copies in book form. The Front Street property at this time was divided into three units, one occupied by the Rankin family and the location from which the Letters were written, one unfinished, and the last used by Ammen to publish The Castigator.[45]

The first edition of John Rankin's book was dated 1826 and titled, Letters on Slavery, Addressed to Mr. Thomas Rankin, Merchant at Middlebrook, Augusta County, Virginia. The book was a scathing and uncompromising indictment on the institution of slavery. Rankin argued rationally and persuasively against slavery, basing his arguments both on biblical tenets and democratic principles. He used extensive illustrations of a poignant and emotional nature to drive home his points, talking of the physical cruelties and frequent sexual abuses, the breakdown of families, and the idleness, intemperance, falsehood, treachery, dishonesty, lewdness, and tyranny that result from slavery.

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[42] Grim, "The Rev. John Rankin," 244-245.

[43] Columbus Dispatch Magazine June 8, 1958, 15-16.

[44] Rankin, Abolitionist, 42; Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 57.

[45] Ibid.

> I consider involuntary slavery a never failing fountain of the grossest immorality, and one of the deepest sources of human misery; it hangs like the mantle of night over our republic, and shrouds its rising glories. I sincerely pity the man who tinges his hand in the unhallowed thing that is fraught with the tears, and sweat, and groans, and blood of hapless millions of innocent and offended people.[46]

The effects of Rankin's Letters were widespread. Distribution of the first edition, however, was small, limited to five hundred copies over a relatively small area of southern Ohio and northern Kentucky. But they aroused the conscience of many people throughout the countryside to the point that many individuals began hiding fugitives temporarily and supplying their needs on the Underground Railroad. When the letters appeared in book form, talk spread about the antislavery men at Ripley until slaves in actual or contemplated flight knew that they had good friends in Ohio. The book's success was a double-edged sword, however, as it drew down upon Rankin, "such a deluge of vituperation and abuse that no man of ordinary force of character could have withstood." This was not all. Early one summer morning in 1826 the warehouse in Maysville, which contained the remaining five hundred unbound copies of the first edition, was set on fire and burned to the ground.[47]

The book's greatest impact took place after William Lloyd Garrison obtained a copy of the work and published it serially in his abolitionist paper, the Liberator. Subsequently, Garrison undertook the publication of later editions through the sponsorship of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Rankin's personal approach, systematic organization, sharp language, and copious illustrations made it a favorite primer and model for other antislavery literature. Letters on American Slavery remained a favorite of Garrison for these reasons. He considered himself not only a co-worker in the cause but one of Rankin's antislavery disciples.[48] Writing to his brother-in-law, Garrison once commented:

> I have read [William Ellery] Channing's work. It abounds with useful truisms expressed in polished terms, but as a whole, is an inflated, inconsistent and slanderous production. I would not give one dozen of [John] Rankin's letters for one hundred copies of Channing's essay.[49]

John Rankin's Letters on American Slavery placed him in the forefront of early antislavery proponents, and the volume became one of the standard works used by abolitionists far and wide as a source of information and inspiration. The Letters gave voice to themes within Rankin which were key in determining the direction of his antislavery work over the next several years. That work took many forms. Probably foremost was his antislavery activity within the presbyteries and synods of the Presbyterian Church. Most of the ministers in the Ripley Presbytery (previously the Chillicothe Presbytery), of which he was a member, were remarkably similar to Rankin in background. Like Rankin, they were born and educated in the South in the Old School theology of Presbyterianism.

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[46] John Rankin, Letters on American Slavery Addressed to Mr. Thomas Rankin, Merchant at Middlebrook, Augusta, Co., Georgia (Boston: Garrison & Knapp, 1833), 7.

[47] Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 58-59.

[48] Ibid., 78-79; Ohio Historical Society, VFM 3294, note from the fly leaf of a copy of writings of William Lloyd Garrison owned by Mrs. Frank Nixon of Ironton, Ohio.

[49] Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 79.

They had emigrated to a free state because of their hatred of slavery and were veteran antislavery workers.[50]

A major part of Rankin's efforts from the 1820s through the mid 1840s was directed specifically toward abolishing slavery within the Presbyterian Church. He waged this antislavery struggle not alone, but as one participant among a unique group of clergy in the Chillicothe, later Ripley, Presbytery. Together, they started out as Old School in theology and to some extent gradualists and colonizationists in terms of their antislavery ideology. But, by 1829, they had abandoned both stances and were beginning to work toward the precepts of "immediate" abolition. In the great division over doctrine which occurred in 1838, Rankin and his Presbytery followed the "New School" or "Constitutional" Presbyterian Church as being the more progressive and more sympathetic to the antislavery cause. However, after nearly another decade, frustrated over their failure to exclude slaveholders from free expression within the church, Rankin and others broke completely with the Presbyterian Church to form a new body called "The Free Presbyterian Church of America," an organization which specifically excluded all slaveholders from membership. Many other congregations outside the Ripley Presbytery from the two older divisions joined the movement. As the unquestioned leader of the Free Church, Rankin organized a synod of more than fifty churches which maintained an active existence until the Civil War, after which time the Free Presbyterian Church merged once again with the New School Assembly.[51]

Although still deeply committed to his church activities, after 1835, with the founding of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, and following his energizing exposure to Theodore Weld and the writing of his own treatise in support of the Lane Seminary students, Rankin became more fully involved with the antislavery movement at large. His experience as a frontier minister made him well-suited for the task in terms of preaching, writing, and organization. He was a founding member of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, attending its first convention at Putnam and Zanesville in 1835, and in November of that year he helped re-organize the Ripley Anti-Slavery Society as a state auxiliary. The following year he gave a major address at the first anniversary convention of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society in which he discussed the duty of the churches in relation to slavery. Later that year, he requested and received a leave of absence from his Ripley Church to become a member of the famous band of "Seventy" antislavery lecturers commissioned by the American Anti-Slavery Society and trained by Theodore Weld to abolitionize the West.[52] Rankin's territory as an agent was southwestern Ohio. He remained on the road for six months of an expected year-long circuit. During that time he faced the animosity of individuals and mobs, yet persevered until ill health sent him home to Ripley, thus ending his brief but impassioned agency on behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

In the decade of the 1840s and 1850s Rankin's abolitionism changed once again. The abolition movement itself experienced a wrenching schism about 1840 from which it was not to recover. Rankin, along with most other conservative-minded abolitionists came to believe that political action rather than moral suasion was necessary to accomplish their goals. Slavery and its evils could only be contained and abolished through the power of legislation. He aligned himself first with the Liberty Party and helped organize and spoke at the occasional county conventions held usually at Ripley or Red Oak. In 1848 he joined many other abolitionists in support of the coalition Free Soil Party, and in the 1850s he became part of the movement which gave birth to the Republican Party. From this time forward, political debate and activity were the focus of John Rankin's activity in the organized

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[50] Ibid., 88; Grim "The Rev. John Rankin," 242

[51] Ibid., 243-244.

[52] Willey, "The Reverend John Rankin," 113 and 173.

antislavery movement.[53]

Though this seemingly conservative stance rankled the more radical Garrisonians, Rankin never compromised his position on the issue of immediate emancipation, nor did his political activities in any way diminish his commitment to the fugitive slave. Ironically, it may not be too much to say that John Rankin in fact prepared the way more than any other early abolitionist for the more aggressive work of Garrison and his followers.[54] Though historians debate the point, Rankin at heart was an advocate of immediate emancipation years before William Lloyd Garrison coined the term. Rankin may not have used the expression "immediate and unconditional emancipation," but he certainly believed in it and was expounding on it as early as 1822 upon his arrival in Ohio. By his own account, these radical sentiments actually dated back to his years as a citizen of Kentucky where he urged the setting of the slaves free by government purchase.

> A thousand million dollars would purchase all the slaves in the union. Four thousand millions in property and money would have been saved, and what is vastly more important, a million lives would have been saved from a bloody death."[55]

Despite his constant striving, neither moral suasion nor political action in the end could free the American slave. Rankin thus continued to participate in the secret campaign against slavery and worked tirelessly to free those he could on the Underground Railroad until the Civil War brought their final emancipation. Rankin, his wife, Jean Lowry, and his sons and daughters kept the lights burning at this station on the Underground Railroad atop Liberty Hill for thirty-five years. After the War, they left the home, their work having been accomplished. Rankin was seventy-two years old at the time. He and his wife sold the hilltop property and spent the next several years visiting and living with their children in a number of western states. Jean Lowry Rankin died in 1878 and John Rankin passed away in Ironton, Ohio in 1886 at the age of ninety-three. Both are buried in Ripley's Maplewood Cemetery where their graves are marked by a bronze bust of the abolitionist and a marble monument with the epitaph, "Freedom's Heroes."

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[53] Ibid., 235-236.

[54] Grim, "The Rev. John Rankin," 254.

[55] Rankin, Abolitionist, 61.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

___ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
_X_ Previously Listed in the National Register.
___ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
___ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
_X_ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #0-630
___ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #__________

Primary Location of Additional Data:

_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State Agency
_X_ Federal Agency
___ Local Government
___ University
___ Other (Specify Repository):

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: approximately 19.905 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	17	253100	4292500
B	17	252860	4292600
C	17	252720	4292860
D	17	253860	4293000

Verbal Boundary Description:

This National Historic Landmark nomination includes the brick house known as 6152 Rankin Road and all that tract of land encompassing 19.905 acres situated in the Village of Ripley, Union Township, Brown County, State of Ohio and in James Poage's Military Survey No. 418, lying southeast of and adjacent to Rankin Road, and more particularly described as follows from a June 10, 1991, survey conducted for annexation of the parcel to the Village of Ripley: (Refer to attached historic map and survey map)

Beginning at a spike found in Rankin Road at the northwest corner to 4.815 acres of land conveyed to Alvin G. & Willa Sue Armstrong by deed recorded in Deed Book 116, Page 556 in the Office of the Recorder of Brown County, Ohio; thence with Alvin G. & Willa Sue Armstrong's line S. 43°00'00" E., 864.06 feet to a spike set at a corner to the land of Everett & Mildred Gill; thence with Everett & Mildred Gill's line S. 43°00'00" E., 638.60 feet to a 1" iron pin set at a corner to the land of Gladys Thomas; thence with Gladys Thomas' line S. 35°30'00" W., 33.00 feet to a 1" iron pin set, S. 2°15'57" W., 227.18 feet to a 1" iron pin set, and S. 12°04'43" E., 303.07 feet to a 1" iron pin set at a corner to the land of Thomas Properties; thence with Thomas Properties' line S. 81°21'20" W., 75.73 feet to a 1" iron pin set, and S. 16°35'54" E., 40.82 feet to a 1" iron pin set at a corner to the land of Colored M.E. Church of Ripley, Ohio; thence with Colored M.E. Church of Ripley, Ohio's line S. 83°46'21" W., 208.71 feet to a 1" iron pin found at a corner to the land of William C. Lucas; thence with William C. Lucas' line S. 71°31'16" W., 118.03 feet to a 1" iron pin set at a corner to the land of Neal F. Zimmers & Neal F. Zimmers, Jr.; thence with Neal F. Zimmers & Neal F. Zimmers, Jr.'s line N. 22°34'32" W., 589.60 feet to a 1" iron pin set, S. 66°24'17" W., 148.64 feet to a 1" iron pin set, and N. 24°20'43" W., 336.75 feet to a 1" iron pin set at a corner to a 20.00 feet wide easement conveyed to the State of Ohio by deed recorded in Deed Book 33, Page 466 in the Office of the Recorder of Brown County, Ohio; thence with the east line of said 20.00 feet wide easement to the State of Ohio N. 24°20'43" W., 20.00 feet to a 1" iron pipe found at a corner to the land of Hugh T. & Mary Gooding; thence with Hugh T. & Mary Gooding's line N. 38°52'26" W., 223.07 feet to a 1" iron pin set; thence with Hugh T. & Mary Gooding's line and Michael F. D'Esposito, Trustee's line N. 43°51'53" W., 344.18 feet to a 1" iron pin set at a corner to the land of Michael F. D'Esposito, Trustee; thence with Michael F. D'Esposito, Trustee's line N. 58°33'12" E., 382.99 feet to a 1" iron pipe found, N. 35°26'14" W., 139.02 feet to a 1" iron pin set, and N. 25°00'00" W., 227.70 feet to a spike set in the center line of Rankin Road; thence along the center line of Rankin Road N. 82°00'00" E., 61.38 feet to the place of beginning and containing 19.905 acres, subject to all existing easements of record. Being the land conveyed to the State of Ohio by deed recorded in Deed Book 33, Page 466 in the Office of the Recorder of Brown County, Ohio.

Boundary Justification:

These boundaries have been selected because they include that portion of the John Rankin property owned by Rankin during the period of significance for this nomination which encompasses the site of the Rankin House, the estimated location of former outbuildings of the Rankin farmstead, and the site of the historic "Liberty Stairway". This NHL boundary coincides with the boundaries of the John Rankin Historic Site property (excluding various rights of way) as purchased by the State of Ohio in 1938. These are the same boundaries of the property known as the John Rankin Historic Site surveyed and approved for annexation to the Village of Ripley, Ohio in February 1992.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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Date: July 15, 1996