

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries complete applicable sections)

STATE:	Indiana
COUNTY:	Wayne
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY DATE	

1. NAME

COMMON:  
Levi Coffin Home

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
Levi Coffin Home

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
115 Main Cross Street ( U. S Route 27)

CITY OR TOWN:  
Fountain City

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
10th

STATE: Indiana CODE: 18 COUNTY: Wayne CODE: 117

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
Indiana Department of Natural Resources

STREET AND NUMBER:  
State Office Building

CITY OR TOWN:  
Indianapolis

STATE:  
Indiana

CODE:  
18

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:  
Registry of Deeds, Wayne County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
Richmond

STATE:  
Indiana 47374

CODE:  
18

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic American Building Survey (10 drawings)

DATE OF SURVEY:  
XX Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Library of Congress/Annex, Division of Photographs and Prints

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:  
Washington

STATE:  
D.C.

CODE:  
11

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE:	Indiana
COUNTY:	Wayne
ENTRY NUMBER	
DATE	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Levi Coffin Home, called the "Union Depot of the Underground Railroad," is a two-story brick building in Federal style, painted red. There is a rear wing which attaches to the northwest corner of the house. The Coffin Home was built in 1827 by its first owner and occupant, Levi Coffin. The house is presently administered by the Levi Coffin House Association; it is owned by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and is leased to the Wayne County Historical Society. The house contains some seven rooms and six fireplaces.

Entering from Main <sup>70055</sup> Street, or the east side, one steps into the central hallway. A staircase leads to the second floor. On either side of the hallway is a room. The room south of the hallway was probably Mr. Coffin's library. It also served as a bedroom. Here are located the original built-in bookcases. The room located north of the hallway was the main parlor. Both these rooms contain original woodwork as do many of the other rooms of the house. The original stone fireplaces have been replaced with brick. To the west of the parlor is the original dining room. This room of simple design has doors which lead to Mill Street, on the north, a porch on the south (see accompanying photograph) and the only subsurface section of the house. Proceeding down the enclosed stairwell, one circles to the kitchen. Here is located the cooking hearth. To the south of the kitchen is an interesting feature, the spring room. Indoor springs were typical of the houses in Newport--a reason for the selection of Fountain City when the name of the town was changed. In the spring room is located a sawdust bin where ice, cut from local ponds, was kept.

The second floor contains three bedrooms. The most interesting is the one located in the northwest wing. Entrance is made by a four-foot high door. On the south side of this room is a small trap door which is thought by many to be a secret compartment used to hide fugitive slaves. This is highly improbable as the door would be clearly visible behind a bed or furniture with legs.

An interesting feature on the north side of the house is the freedom walkway. Here the names of local personalities who have donated various amounts of money have their names inscribed on concrete slabs. Though not original to the house, it is an interesting fundraiser.

The Coffin Home was used as a hotel during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A wooden addition was placed on the wing. (See accompanying photograph.) This addition has been removed by the Coffin House Association and the house has been meticulously restored to a close facsimile of the house during the Coffin occupancy.

Boundary Information and Justification

The Levi Coffin Home sits on the east side of U.S. Route 27. The house faces east. Sitting within the boundaries of the landmark is an old barn and privy. (See photograph) Though not original to the Coffin premises,

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1827-1848**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Music		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation			

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Levi Coffin, because of his outstanding role in the operation of the Underground Railroad, has been termed its "president." He is believed to have helped over 2,000 runaway slaves escape to freedom.

Coffin moved to Newport (now Fountain City), Indiana in 1826, opened a store, and upon learning that he was on the line of the Underground Railroad, offered his house as a depot. A week seldom passed without his receiving a passenger. The expenses of this undertaking were heavy, and Coffin could not have borne them without the income from his store.

Coffin remained in Newport for 21 years. During this time he continued his work with the Underground Railroad and also worked with the Committee on the Concerns of People of Color. Immediately after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, Coffin began working to aid the freedmen. In 1864, he ventured to England where he spurred the formation of an English Freedmen's Aid Society, which in one year contributed over \$100,000 in money, clothing and other articles for the newly freed Negro. He again went to Europe in 1867 to attend the International Anti-Slavery Conference in Paris. Following this he lived in retirement until his death in 1877.

Biography

Although raised amidst slavery, Coffin never accepted it. He was born on October 28, 1780, on a farm in North Carolina, the youngest of seven children born to Quaker parents. Because of his environment he acquired an intimate knowledge of slavery. He writes in his Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, for example, of the terror created in him when only seven as he saw a group of Negroes chained together stumble past a field in which he and his father were. Because Levi was the only boy in the family, he did not begin any formal schooling until he was 21, he having to help his father on the farm. After coming of age, Coffin acquired his only formal education, alternately attending and teaching school for some years. In 1821, he and a cousin organized a Sunday school for Negroes at New Garden, but the masters soon forbade their chattel to attend, forcing the closing of the school. About three years later, Levi married Catherine White also a Quaker, on October 28, 1824.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Coffin, Levi, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, (Cincinnati, 1880).  
Dictionary of American Biography  
 Gara, Lary, The Liberty Line, the Legend of the Underground Railroad,  
 (Lexington, Kentucky, 1961).  
 Peat, Wilbur D., Indiana Houses of the Nineteenth Century, (Indianapolis  
 1964), Plate 4.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	0 ' "	0 ' "		16.677920.4424800	0 ' "	
NE	0 ' "	0 ' "			0 ' "	
SE	0 ' "	0 ' "			0 ' "	
SW	0 ' "	0 ' "			0 ' "	

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **less than 1 acre**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: **Joseph S. Mendinghall, Historian Bradford** (Original Form completed by S. Sydney  
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, HISTORIC SITES SURVEY) DATE: **9/26/75**  
 ORGANIZATION: **National Park Service, Historic Sites Survey**  
 STREET AND NUMBER: **1100 L Street NW.**  
 CITY OR TOWN: **Washington** STATE: **D.C.** CODE: **11**

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name: **Landmark** JUNE 23, 1965  
 Designated: ..... date  
 Title: **Boundary Certified:** Sept. 1977  
Joseph Mendinghall .....  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date: **9/18/77**

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

STATE	Indiana	
COUNTY	Wayne	
FOR NPS USE ONLY		
ENTRY NUMBER		DATE

Levi Coffin Home

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

7. Description

Continued

page 2

these structures do complement the house and aid in the interpretation of the landmarks historic use. These structures do not contribute to the national significance of the landmark.

Beginning at the point of juncture of U.S. Route 27 and Mill Street proceed in an easterly direction along the south curb of Mill Street to a point of intersection with Water Street (presently an access alleyway); thence proceed in a southerly direction along the west curb of Water Street to a point of intersection with the Coffin Home property line; thence proceed in an easterly direction along this property line to a point of intersection with U.S Route 27; thence proceed in a northerly direction along the west curb of U.S. Route 27 to the point of origin. This boundary is indicated by a red line on the accompanying property plat map, labeled the Levi Coffin House, Property Plat Map, Fountain City, Indiana, and a site drawing (HABS) by R. G. Exley, labeled the Levi Coffin House.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

STATE	Indiana
COUNTY	Wayne
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

Levi Coffin Home

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance

Continued

page 2

Coffin moved to Newport, Indiana, in 1826, where he lived for the next 20 years as a successful business man. He opened a store, and despite a temporary loss of business when he began aiding runaway Negroes, it prospered. His prosperity, indeed, underwrote much of his activity in the underground railroad. In addition to that work, Coffin labored in behalf of the schools and poor in his area, and he supported the temperance movement. When he moved to Cincinnati in 1847, he opened a store that dealt in goods that were made by free labor. And when emancipation occurred during the Civil War, Coffin devoted much of the remainder of his life to improving the lot of the freed slaves. He travelled to England in 1864 and spurred the organization of an English Freedmen's Aid Society, which in one year dispatched over \$100,000 worth of money, clothes and other articles to the United States. He spent the last decade of his life more or less in retirement, but up to his death in 1877 the Negro always remained close to his heart.

Of all of his humanitarian work, Coffin's labor in behalf of the underground railroad remains most significant. Coffin did not favor expeditions into the South to free slaves, but he showed no hesitancy in befriending escaped Negroes after moving to Newport. There, he first became familiar with the efforts of free Negroes to help their brothers, but soon realized that the handicaps under which they worked reduced the effectiveness of their aid. He thus joined the undertaking and organized the effort, doing what many other Quakers in Newport had been afraid to do. From the beginning, Coffin made little effort to hide what he was doing, and his home became popular. He frequently made no effort to hide any Negroes who were at his house. Coffin met amazingly little opposition to his endeavor, perhaps because he made it clear that any interference would bring legal action. His prosperity, which gave him economic influence in his community, also probably toned down opposition. He became a director of a bank, for example, and thus was in a position to influence the granting of loans.

As news of Coffin's activities spread, he began to receive ex-slaves from all over the South. Whenever there was a knock on Coffin's door, especially at night, it was usually that of a runaway slave. Because most Negroes arrived hungry and poorly clothed, Coffin had to feed and clothe them. Although others helped with the feeding and clothing, much of the burden fell directly on Coffin's shoulders. Generally, after the escapees had rested, he would escort them to the next station. Sometimes, though, Negroes were ill or exhausted, and then they would stay until fit to travel. In one instance, two Negroes, who arrived with frozen feet, lived there for three months. At another time, a semi-wild creature would stop at his house, as Coffin subsequently recalled in his Reminiscences.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

STATE	Indiana
COUNTY	Wayne
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

Levi Coffin Home

(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance

Continued

page 3

Sometimes the poor hunted creatures had been out so long, living in woods and thickets, that they were almost wild when they came in, and so fearful of being betrayed, that it was some time before their confidence could be gained and the true state of their case learned.<sup>1</sup>

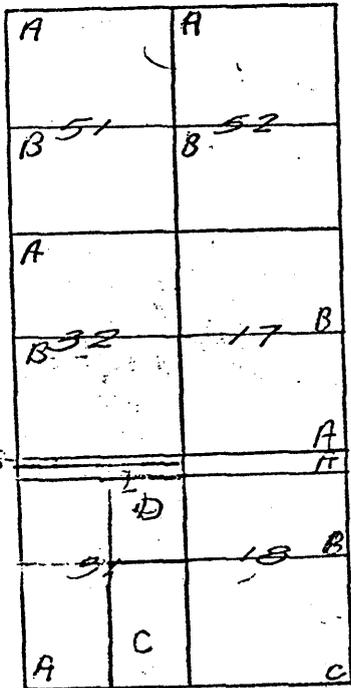
But for those who could travel, Coffin kept a team always ready. Because in many instances the runaways were pursued, Coffin had several routes to the next stations that were from ten to twenty miles away.

Over the years while in Newport, Coffin may have helped about 100 runaway slaves per year. Even if he aided far less than 2,000 during these twenty years, Coffin remains a remarkable figure in the history of American humanitarianism.

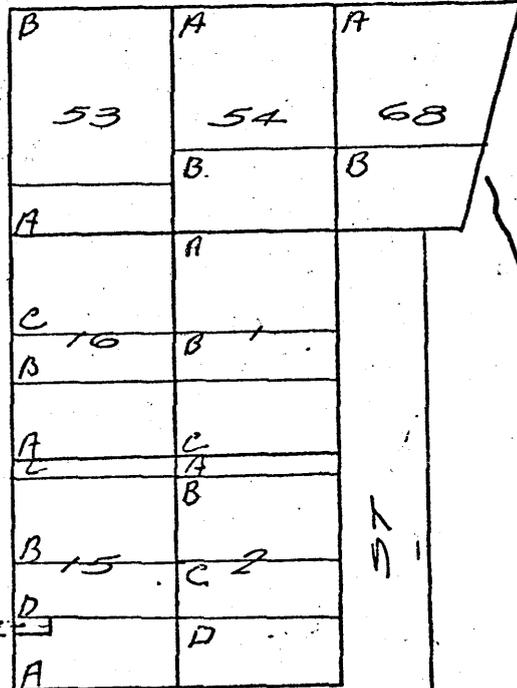
---

<sup>1</sup>Levi Coffin, Reminiscences of Levi Coffin (Cincinnati, 1880), p. 120.

STREET



ST



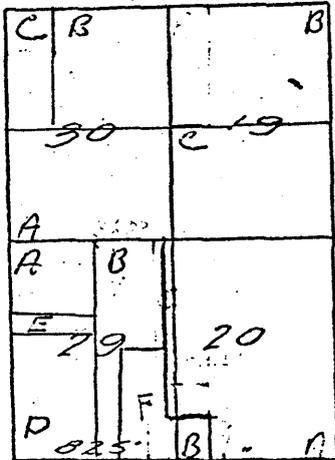
(Route 27)

ST

MILL

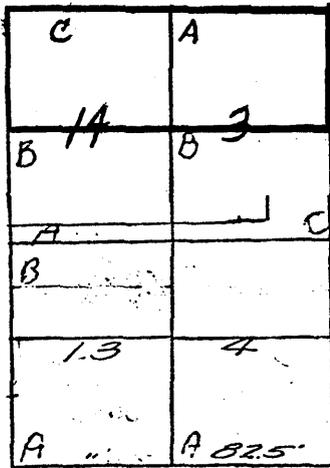
ST

WALNUT



MAIN CROSS

WATER



MAIN

STREET

