1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: **PARKER, JOHN P., HOUSE**

Other Name/Site Number: BRO-56-17

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 300 Front Street Not for publication: N/A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:	X	Building(s):	X
Public-Local:	____	District:	____
Public-State:	____	Site:	____
Public-Federal:	____	Structure:	____
		Object:	____

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	1 buildings
____	____ sites
____	____ structures
____	____ objects
1	1 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:	VACANT/NOT IN USE	Sub:

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: No Style

MATERIALS:
Foundation: STONE
Walls: BRICK
Roof: TIN
Other:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The John P. Parker House, situated along Front Street on lot 66 and parts of lots 67 and 76 in the village of Ripley, Ohio (Union Township, Brown County), faces an unobstructed view of the Ohio River to the south and west and sits less than 100 feet back from the river bank. Found at the far western end of Front Street, the building's remote location contrasts sharply with the blocks of elegant nineteenth century residences which line Front Street further east, between Locust and Main streets. The Parker House currently is set on a village lot of approximate 100' frontage. Immediately east of the property is a one-story tobacco warehouse at the corner of Locust and Front streets. A one-story metal commercial building with elevations both on Front Street and Sycamore Street is situated adjacent on the west. The site is vacant at the rear, extending to an alley and to properties fronting on Second Street. Side and rear yards appear either vacant or are currently used in part for long-term parking of trucks and other vehicles. The site has been cleared of brush and shade trees in recent years and is now barren except for a single, tall deciduous tree at the rear of the house. Situated about 20-30 feet east of the house near Front Street (within the boundaries of this nomination) is a small, one-room, frame building with a gable roof and aluminum siding. It dates from c. 1940 and was used as an office for the coal yard that operated here in the mid-twentieth century. This building is non-contributing.

Front Street terminates at Sycamore Street near the mouth of Red Run Creek. Historically, this westernmost block of Front Street was taken up by industrial uses. Previously, the city gas works occupied the property just north of the Parker House at Sycamore Street, and the Ripley Mill and Lumber Company (and its predecessors) conducted business from two other nearby sites, one between Sycamore Street and Red Run, and the other immediately adjacent to the Parker House at Locust Street (now the site of the tobacco warehouse). The Ohio Piano Company, an important Ripley manufacturing establishment, occupied the corner of Second and Locust Streets for decades and part of that complex remains standing today.

The John P. Parker House is now all that remains of an integrated residential and manufacturing establishment at this location. Dating to ca. 1853, and known at various times as the J.P. Parker Foundry and the Phoenix Foundry, the complex originally included the present two-story brick dwelling with a contiguous one and one-half story brick machine shop along the west elevation and a one-story frame foundry and blacksmith shop extending approximately eighty feet to the rear. Three smaller frame sheds projected from the northeast corner of the foundry and a cistern was placed just outside the northwest corner of this rear structure (See Figure 1).

In 1889, a fire destroyed the rear portion of the site housing the foundry, cupola furnace, core oven, blacksmith shop, and rear sheds. Parker did not rebuild the foundry operation on this site following the fire, but instead moved it to a nearby warehouse on the north side of Sycamore Street at Front Street, now the site of buildings owned by the Ripley Corporation. According to Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps drawn in 1890, only a section of the rear structure remained intact following the fire, including a ten horsepower engine and a forty foot chimney along a recessed east elevation. The machine shop and residence were spared from complete destruction at this time, although they likely experienced extensive damage from the fire.[1]

There does not appear to have been direct access to the machine shop or rear foundry from the main house, nor do any of the structures appear to have shared party walls. It is not certain when the

[1] A local newspaper reported on the fire, stating that "The Ripley Saw and Planing Mills, the dwelling and foundry of J.P. Parker and the Piano Factory and dwelling of Wm. Rade, together with a large amount of lumber and other material was destroyed by fire last Friday morning about two o'clock." People's Defender, August 8, 1889. Physical evidence indicates that the house was in fact not destroyed by fire at this time although it likely did not escape extensive damage.

machine shop was removed from the site, nor when the surviving structure, the dwelling house, was erected. While documentary evidence suggests a circa 1850 construction date, architecturally, the main wing of the house may date as much as two decades earlier; the rear L, however, appears to have been a later addition.

Today, the Parker House is an L-shaped two-story brick building, approximately 25' x 50', laid in common bond. A two-story nineteenth century wooden addition set within the L of the house, until recently, gave the entire property a rectangular shape. The exterior walls and interior partitions of this narrow addition have been removed; all that remains is a tall, narrow, free-standing brick chimney, probably for a stove of some kind, which pierces the northeasternmost corner of the roof.

The Parker House is three-bays wide set on a rough-cut coursed stone foundation. The basement extends under the original masonry part of the house. There are single basement windows (now appearing as holes in the foundation) along the main and rear elevations. The main wing of the house has a laterally-oriented gable roof and the rear wing features a continuous shed roof covering both the brick L and the former frame addition. The section of the roof previously covering the frame addition is now held in place with wooden braces secured along the east wall. The entire house is covered with a standing seam tin roof which is badly rusted and partially open. The roof of the main wing has stepped gables with a chimney incorporated into the gable end on the west. Both gable ends are badly deteriorated and the chimney is missing. The rear portion of the house has a two foot high parapet wall along the west elevation, concealing the shed roof.

Windows are two over two double-hung sash (currently without glass) with smooth-cut stone lintels and lugsills. A simple, unadorned wooden cornice with stone endcaps at one time extended fully across the main facade, but is now almost completely deteriorated. Steps leading to the principal entrance of the building are a single piece of cast iron consisting of three steps and a platform said to have been made at the Parker foundry. As with other openings, the main entrance has a plain stone lintel and sill. The single Victorian door is framed by beaded columns and panels as well as a transom and sidelights.

Sidewalls of the main wing have no fenestration. The west elevation of the brick L at the far northern end is pierced by two symmetrically placed pairs of windows on the first and second stories and there is a single first floor window, (now boarded) along the north or rear elevation. The wooden addition, dating to the second half of the nineteenth century, now entirely open and without interior partitions, originally was surfaced with eight inch wide horizontal clapboards and had doors in the rear wall on both the first and second floors. There also were remnants of a stairway which led down from the second floor door. All exterior walls of this wood-frame addition were recently removed, exposing interior walls, doors, and windows on main and upper levels. The walls are either of deteriorating plaster or exposed brick. A basement door is accessed along this elevation via five very steep stone steps. The narrow width of this former wood frame wing and the windows and doors which appear all along this elevation suggest that this addition actually was utilized as an enclosed porch. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps dating to ca. 1884 indicate that this wood frame addition was at one time open on the first level, although the rear one-third of the structure on the first floor appears to have been enclosed around the existing corner chimney.

The main or Front Street entrance of the Parker House enters into a side hallway that features a winding walnut stairway with turned banisters. There is a single landing with a ninety degree turn to upstairs rooms and a doorway leading out onto the former wood-frame addition. The main wing of the house is narrow, only eighteen feet.

A door immediately to the left upon entering the hallway leads to a single room which occupies the remaining first floor space of the main wing. A marble mantle in this front room has fallen off the wall

and through the floor. Evidence of a ceramic tile hearth was found in the basement beneath. A door at the rear of the hall, underneath the stairway exits the building. There is also a door to a storage area underneath the stairs. The second floor plan of the main wing consists of two rooms, one tiny room ten feet wide above the front hallway and another larger adjacent room running the width of the main wing of the house from south to north. Here is found the only intact fireplace, which features a simple classical wood mantle and a later decorative pierced iron screen.

The rear L of the house is in a severe state of deterioration. There were originally two upper and two lower rooms, the front rooms being slightly larger than those to the rear. Partition walls between rooms appear to have fallen through first and second floors into the basement along with exterior wall fireplaces.

The majority of interior woodwork, found mostly on the first floor of the main wing, is wide, fluted, and has corner rosettes. Doors are of solid wood and vary in style and size. All floors are of painted four inch tongue and groove planking. Outside walls are plaster directly on the brick and partition walls are plaster over wood lath. All walls appear to have been papered. Most of the plaster is deteriorated, having fallen away from the walls in some areas. Ceilings are absent, only floor and roof joists are visible. Until recent times the ceilings were plaster over wood lath, most of which had been papered.[2] The house is in a severe state of dilapidation.

[2] The preceding description was based on a site inspection of the property and also drew on information from the University of Cincinnati, Department of Architecture, "John P. Parker House: Historic Structure Report," 1981.

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, Invention, Ethnic Heritage--Black

Period(s) of Significance: ca. 1853-1865

Significant Dates:

Significant Person(s): Parker, John P.

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 John P. Parker House is significant as a National Historic Landmark under Criteria 1 and 2 for John Parker's important association with the American antislavery movement and the Underground Railroad. It should be noted that there is potential for archaeological information dating at least to the period of the mid-nineteenth century. A former slave, Parker was one of many African-American conductors on the Underground Railroad in the decades preceding the Civil War, but his particular significance is magnified by the fact that his role is well documented both in local records and in his autobiographical reminiscences recorded before his death in 1900.

Although Parker's reputation is largely confined to the region of southwestern Ohio and northern Kentucky, his accomplishments in the decade and a half prior to the Civil War and during that conflict are significant in the context of the antebellum drive to abolish slavery in the United States. Parker was not an outspoken abolitionist among his peers. He appears never to have joined or participated in the activities of antislavery societies and never achieved the notoriety of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, or many of the other less celebrated black abolitionists from New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and other large urban centers in the North. Rather, it was Parker's unflagging and oftentimes heroic efforts to rescue escaped slaves from the "borderlands" along the Ohio River that underscores the major role played by African-Americans not only as slaves and as fugitives, but as rescuers on the Underground Railroad.

After having obtained his own freedom, John Parker not only assisted escaped slaves en route to Canada, but repeatedly secreted himself back into slave territory to free them and to lead them to safety. As far as can be determined, with only one exception, he did not hide escaping slaves at his Front Street property, but Parker lived and worked here during the antebellum era, residing at this site probably as early as 1853. It was from this location that he worked diligently and with great risk to his life and property with other Ripley abolitionists and conductors on the Underground Railroad. Although his significance is derived from his role as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, John Parker's importance is further enhanced by his position in Ripley society as a noted businessman, inventor, and entrepreneur. Parker operated an iron foundry at this site from ca. 1853 until his death in 1900 and developed and patented a number of inventions from this location. He is, in fact, notable as being ranked among the few African-Americans who obtained U.S. patents for their inventions in the nineteenth century. The John P. Parker House illustrates these achievements and the antislavery activities of this former slave, inventor, entrepreneur, and conductor on the Underground Railroad.

The role of free blacks such as John Parker of Ripley, Ohio in developing and nurturing the antislavery movement has made American abolitionism unique.[3] Organized black abolitionists were speaking out in opposition to African colonization efforts as early as 1817. By the decade of the 1830s, a vocal black press was addressing not only issues of slavery but of race and civil rights for free blacks, and they were underwriting an increasingly radical campaign for immediate emancipation as voiced by such national figures as William Lloyd Garrison in the Liberator. African-Americans worked in the antebellum period as active participants in reaching an interracial consensus against slavery in major national organizations such as the American Antislavery Society established in 1833. By the decade of the 1840s, the rise of African-American leaders like Frederick Douglass reflected the increasing importance of former bondsman in the antislavery crusade, replacing or superseding the well-established free black elites who had predominated in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Ultimately, in a break with white Garrisonian abolitionism, a growing militancy, race consciousness,

[3] Roy E. Finkenbine, Michael F. Hembree, and Donald Yacovone, eds. Witness for Freedom: African-American Voices on Race, Slavery, and Emancipation (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993),27.

and involvement in the national political arena would characterize the black antislavery movement through the period of the Civil War.

Among the more publicized activities of black abolitionists in the antebellum period were the black vigilance committees, situated mostly in larger cities along the eastern seaboard. These groups worked together in a "skillfully orchestrated, black-directed underground railroad network" that operated across the North and the upper South.[4] Often assisted by whites, these black vigilance committees liberated many slaves and aided thousands of others in their escape to freedom. Elsewhere, especially in the borderlands between the free states and slave states, individual free blacks such as John Parker, often working as one-man vigilance committees, proved instrumental in assuring safe passage to the fugitive. As was often the case, once on the "road," the escaped slave tended initially to trust others of his or her race rather than whites, and so these fugitives from oppression often radiated toward and were concealed in all kinds of free black communities throughout the North and West.

As distinct from the more extensively documented white antislavery crusade, black abolitionism focused on the practical rather than theoretical or abstract antislavery. John Parker's secretive activities in aiding fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad provide but a single example. More broadly speaking, the entire question of racial equality was at issue.[5] Black abolitionists called not only for the elimination of chattel slavery but for political action, voting and other civil rights, and an end to the struggle against racial prejudice and oppression. Their cause was fought with good reason. Free blacks in the northern states faced prejudicial and paternalistic treatment even at the hands of their peers within the antislavery movement. Far worse were black laws legislated in states outside the South which denied African-Americans basic civil liberties. In Ohio, for instance, although at no time in the history of the state did pro-slavery sentiment predominate, there were those who were opposed to the presence of African-Americans in Ohio whether slave or free, and a prevalent legalized racism became the means for restricting their numbers.[6]

Free blacks had resided in Ohio from the time the territory achieved statehood in 1803, but they numbered only a few thousand as late as the 1820s. On the eve of the Civil War, the free black population in Ohio had increased to 36,700, but that figure still represented only slightly more than two percent of the population.[7] Some had come early in the century by way of the colonization of Southern blacks on Ohio soil by owners who wished to free their slaves and make them self-sufficient. One of the earliest migrations of record occurred in Brown County where in 1818 some 900 manumitted slaves of Samuel Gist of Virginia were settled on two large tracts of land, one about three miles north of Georgetown, in Pleasant Township (White Oak Settlement), and the other in the northeast part of the county, located two miles from Sardinia in Washington Township (Brush Creek Settlement).[8] These slave families did not prosper, however. Some returned to Virginia, while many more were reduced to

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[4] Ibid., 15.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Charles Jay Wilson, "The Negro in Early Ohio" in Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly 39 No. 4 (1930), 719.

[7] George W. Knepper, Ohio and Its People (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1989), 206.

[8] Although Samuel Gist's settlement is probably most frequently referenced in the historical literature, there were other earlier settlements, for instance, in 1796 William Dunlop migrated from Fayette County, Kentucky to Brown County, Ohio bringing a large number of slaves with him. He set them free and established them on land about three miles north of what was to become the village of Ripley. William Birney, James G. Birney and His Times (New York: Negro University Press, 1969; 1890 reprint), 432.

pauperism. In later years their lands were sold and eventually only a few families remained as relics of these once large settlements. But as late as 1850, there were sizeable communities of blacks residing in southern Ohio. In Brown County, for instance, free blacks included seven percent (7%) of the population in Union Township (where the village of Ripley is located), ten percent (10%) in Scott Township, and seventeen percent (17%) in Eagle Township.[9]

Elsewhere, communities of free blacks were unevenly distributed throughout the state of Ohio with the largest concentrations in Hamilton (Cincinnati), Ross, Gallia, and Franklin counties. Hamilton County accounted for ten percent (10%) of the state's black population with 3,600 persons. The southwestern quadrant of the state outside of Hamilton County, in addition to the eastern counties of Muskingum, Belmont, and Jefferson, the latter two counties with a large Quaker presence, also contained heavy concentrations. Few blacks lived in the northern counties, however. Cuyahoga County, which included Cleveland, led with 1,277, but thirty-four northern counties had fewer than 100 black residents each and some counties, especially in the northwestern part of the state had none at all.[10]

Despite the demographics, a kind of racial paranoia existed in the new state of Ohio, especially in the southern tier of counties where the number of free blacks was highest. Many whites feared that Ohio was being made a dumping ground for manumitted slaves and believed the state's borders needed protection from a massive influx of southern blacks. Though the claims were exaggerated, a series of "black codes" were instituted beginning about 1804, laws which, in essence, not only discouraged black migration into the state but attempted to drive free blacks out of the state entirely. Among the provisions included in Ohio's black codes were requirements for certificates of freedom and work permits, prohibition against blacks testifying in a court of law on their own behalf in any case in which a white person was involved, and segregated public schooling. Although many of these provisions were generally ignored, Ohio's black codes severely restricted the social and material advancement of African-Americans throughout the state. Their frustration over a subservient status at times spilled over into racial riots, such as that which took place in Cincinnati in 1829, riots often precipitated by job competition with Ohio's growing immigrant population.[11]

Despite an overt racism, or perhaps because of it, the seeds of antislavery sentiment in Ohio began to grow into a movement of major significance as early as 1815. Quakers, who were among some of the earliest settlers in Ohio, provided leadership in the abolitionist movement from the outset. One of the most notable of the State's early Quakers, for instance, was Benjamin Lundy, who established the first western antislavery society in 1815 at St. Clairsville. Within a few years Lundy and others were publishing their views in a small local abolitionist press -- the Philanthropist out of Mt. Pleasant (NHL: Benjamin Lundy House, May 30, 1974)-- and Lundy's own Genius of Universal Emancipation was first published in Ohio in 1821.[12] Many early abolitionists in Ohio began their careers as proponents of the American Colonization Society. Formed in 1816, this group favored the establishment in Africa of a colony for America's free blacks, and the Society secured Liberia on the west coast of Africa as a place for their relocation. The colonization movement died out early on, however, as the idea gave way in the minds and writings of abolitionists to the concept of gradual emancipation without colonization,

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[9] U.S. Federal Census, 1850; "Transplanting Free Negroes to Ohio from 1815 to 1858" in The Journal of Negro History 1 No. 3 (1916), 303; Wilbur H. Siebert, "Interview with Capt. R.C. Rankin," Ripley, Ohio, April 8, 1892. Wilbur H. Siebert Collection, Ohio Historical Society, Box 102.

[10] Knepper, Ohio and Its People, 205.

[11] Wilson, "The Negro in Early Ohio," 754-762; Knepper, Ohio and Its People, 205.

[12] Knepper, Ohio and Its People, 207-208; 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), 482-483.

and by 1830, to a demand among a radical fringe or hard-core of abolitionists for immediate emancipation for all slaves.

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.[13] 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.[14] 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 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.[15]
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

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[13] 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.

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

[15] 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.

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."[16] 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.[17] 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 because of the city's sizeable black population. Hearing word of the debates and agitated by the student's work within the black community, citizens pressured college officials to put a stop to the student's 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.

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-affiliated antislavery societies in Ohio claimed about 10,000 members; just two years later those numbers had nearly tripled. The great bulk of these societies were found on the Western Reserve, with central and southwestern Ohio providing the rest.[18]

In point of fact, 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

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[16] 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).

[17] Thomas, Theodore Weld, 70.

[18] Volpe, Forlorn Hope of Freedom, 12; Knepper, Ohio and Its People , 209.

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 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 also. 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 communities as Mt. Pleasant, Salem, Lisbon, and other towns mostly in southwestern Ohio and brought with them a message of pacifism and opposition to slavery. Though their influence in the antislavery cause was considerable, their numbers were small in relation to the overall population.[19]

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.[20] 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.

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.

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]."[21] 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.[22]

Mob activity, precipitated by the attempted arrest of "underground passengers," often provided the best

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

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

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

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

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.[23]

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.[24] 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, "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 were antislavery men from North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Virginia.[25]

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.[26]

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

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[23] 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.

[24] 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.

[25] Ibid., 54.

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

connecting routes north at Russellville, Decatur, and Sardinia.[27]

A number of those remembered 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, John Parker recalled a few of the old homes still standing at the time which were 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.
>
> 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. Like the Collins house and all the other houses of these early abolitionists, the door was always ajar, and the candle in the room lighted and waiting to welcome any and all who entered.[28]

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:

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[27] Stivers, Ripley, Ohio, 69.

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

> 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.[29]

John Parker's home itself was along the riverfront at the far west end of Front Street, somewhat isolated from the residential blocks further east. The house stood immediately adjacent to an iron foundry over which Parker had become proprietor about 1854. As Parker's home and shop were on the top of the bank of the river, the site proved easily accessible to anyone who cared to row across the river and walk up to the top of the bank. On the other hand, being remote from the homes of his friends, Parker's property was all the more accessible to those who ventured to attack him, i.e. the slave catchers.[30] Although there is no record of Parker's ownership of the site until 1865, it appears that he resided here in the antebellum period, as evidenced from his reminiscences about the home in the late 1880s when his ownership and residency are accurately documented.

> I am now living under my own roof [on Front Street], which still stands just as it did in the old strange days. I saw it grow brick by brick. It too has heard the gentle tapping of fugitives. It also has heard the cursing at the door of the angry masters. It too has played its part in concealing men and women seeking a haven of safety. Standing, facing the river, it has weathered the storms of years, very much better than its owner and builder. But we have seen adventurous nights together, which I am glad to say, will never come again.[31]

Although he oftentimes worked alone, John Parker nonetheless was part of a larger, loosely organized network of "railroad" conductors in and about the abolitionist stronghold of Ripley. According to Parker, early on in his work of aiding the fugitive slave, his contact with the other Ripley and Brown County abolitionists was always close and was maintained as such until the end of the Civil War.[32] Unlike his antislavery contemporaries in Ripley, however, Parker time and again secreted himself across the Ohio River into the borderlands of Northern Kentucky in search of escaping slaves, providing them safe passage on the final leg of their journey to the North and freedom. At times, escaped slaves would be brought to Parker's door by other "conductors" or friends and he would quickly move them along to the homes of other Ripley Underground Railroad men such as the Colllins brothers, Thomas McCague, John Rankin, or further up the line to Rev. James Gilliland where they would be temporarily hidden in the Red Oak Presbyterian Church (National Register of Historic Places, 6-17-82) about four miles north of Ripley. According to Parker, "[i]n the main my work was to continuously get the fugitives out of town, see them safely [passed on to agents of the Underground Railroad]."[33]

Although Parker aided the fugitive slaves from his Front Street property, as far as can be determined, only once did he in fact hide escaping slaves in his own home. In this incident, two escaped slaves had

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[29] Ibid., ii, 52.

[30] Sprague, His Promised Land, 69.

[31] Ibid., 52.

[32] Ibid., 64.

[33] Ibid., 68.

fallen prey to a paid spy whose intent was to bring them to the local Marshal's office and secure a reward. En route, the spy was overtaken by a group of colored free men, who forcibly rescued the two men and brought them to Parker's house, where as he relates the story, his first mistake was to accept responsibility for the fugitives. According to Parker, "as it was too late to get them away before daylight, I did the second wrong thing by hiding them in my own house, something which I had always refused to do before. So I took them up to my attic hoping that there was no one [who had] followed the fugitives to my house. Then the rumpus began and I had the fright of my whole life."[34]

John Parker had already attained considerable notoriety among the slave catchers who worked along the borderlands of northern Kentucky. An armed crowd who had met up with the "spy" evidently knew that the two fugitives had been brought to Parker's house, and although they did not own the two runaways, they felt that "this was their one chance to get even if not completely rid of [Parker] as a menace to their own slaves."[35]

> I had hardly settled myself down for a nap, when there came a hard knocking at my front door. I made the third mistake this night by going directly to my door instead of making my first observations out of the front window. As I unlocked and opened the door the crowd rushed me, seizing me violently....
>
> Being helpless in their hands, I made a great bluff of innocence, asking them to search the house, if they wished to do so.... First they examined every nook and corner downstairs, placing guards around the house to see that no one got away. Not having formulated a plan, I delayed the search as much as I could, still looking for a loop hole. Having finished the first floor, they started up the stairs.... At the top of the stairs I shouted in a loud voice to my captors, that they could look the house over and even on the roof, [but] they would find no one. This I did for the benefit of the two slaves in the attic, not only to notify them of their danger, but to give them a clue to take refuge on the roof, which was my only chance of getting out of the jam. After this loud talk I conducted the party into my bedroom, kept them busy looking into closets, slamming the doors, and making all the confusion I could, to muffle any row the slaves might make in their efforts to escape capture....
>
> All the while I was fairly quaking inwardly with fear, from the discovery of the two slaves that would surely follow, when the garret was searched. I put off swallowing this bitter pill as long as I could, as I could see the confiscation of all my land and seized property, and the wreckage of my whole life's work. I had a fleeting hope that in some way the stairs to the attic would be overlooked, as the whole party had passed by them in their search.
>
> It was only a fleeting hope, however, for as we crowded out into the hall one of the searchers exclaimed: "there's the attic stairs." If the man had pronounced the judgment of death upon me, I could not have felt the shock more, than I did at this announcement of his discovery....
>
> I knew the room permitted no hiding place for one man, let alone two, as it was a plain attic with rafters showing overhead and clear floor beneath. The detection of the two men was only a question of a few moments. The man ahead of me carried a lighted lantern, the feeble rays dimly dispelling the darkness of the attic. Looking through the

[34]Ibid., 101.

[35]Ibid., 101.

gloom, I saw the shadowy outline of the two...figures in the farthest corner.

I faltered and my heart went sick as I waited for the exultant shout of the men about me. If the leader was blind surely the men who crowded up the stairs would see, but they too stared and said nothing. Could my eyes deceive me? Not at all, because there in front of them I could see the two fugitives so that it was only a question of time for my captors to be accustomed to the surrounding darkness, to see the slaves as I saw them.

I turned my eyes away, for fear my staring would give the position of the two slaves away, still I could not conceive how two men could be in plain sight as these were to me, and not be seen by the rest of the party. I suggested that we go back downstairs. Instead, the man with a lantern advanced further into the attic, while the outline of the two fugitives faded away leaving only an empty space.

A diligent search through out the garret proved that the men had escaped [a surprise] to me and a complete puzzle to the searchers. I was really puzzled myself until I discovered the ladder leading to the roof was missing. Then it was that I knew that my two men were hugging the roof, but they had [taken] the precaution to haul up the ladder with them. I had a bad moment when the man with the latern held it high over his head; it was only the last act of his futile search of the disappointed crowd.[36]

Much of what is known of John P. Parker comes from his narrated autobiography written down by Frank M. Gregg, a journalist and author whose research and interviews conducted in the 1880s and 1890s have provided much of the documentary evidence used in commemorating the town of Ripley's role in the antislavery crusade. Though at times recognized for his work on the Underground Railroad, Parker's name has just as often been omitted from lists of celebrated figures of Underground Railroad fame. For years, his memoir went unrecognized, though the original copy was preserved in the archives of the Flowers' Collection of Southern Americana at Duke University Library. Notes from the handwritten interview have recently been fully transcribed and are soon to be published as the autobiography of John P. Parker by W.W Norton Press under the title, His Promised Land: The Autobiography of John P. Parker Former Slave and Conductor on the Underground Railroad," Stuart Seely Sprague, editor.

John Parker, a mulatto, was born in Norfolk, Virginia in 1827 of a black mother and a white father. Separated from his mother at the age of eight, Parker was sold into slavery and forced to walk in chains along with a gang of 400 slaves from the slave block in Richmond, Virginia to the end of the slave trail at Mobile, Alabama. Parker spoke of an inner rage over his condition even as a young boy and he never acquiesced to accept his status as slave. Fortuitously, the boy was bought by a kindly doctor in Mobile, Alabama and Parker lived with some contentment and security for a number of years. The doctor's sons taught young Parker to read and write and, secretly, he read voraciously from the doctor's private library.

[36]Ibid., 103-104.

At about the age of thirteen, the doctor encouraged Parker to learn a trade, believing the lad would never be content to work as a house man; the only other alternative being work as a slave in the cotton fields. Apprenticed to a plasterer who used him cruelly, Parker soon escaped, nearly losing his life more than once. A mixture of luck and ingenuity helped him evade greedy captors at least three different times during the escape. Ultimately, Parker returned, almost miraculously, to the kind care of the Mobile doctor who at once arranged for his placement with the owner of an iron foundry.

Being of an inventive turn of mind, by his own account, Parker soon was doing more and better work than any man in the shop. During this time, as was the case with many "urban" slaves in the south, Parker was allowed to keep his own wages. Still young, the boy became extravagant in the use of his pay and found himself frequently in confrontation with employers or co-workers, those who resented most of all his mechanical abilities and success at the bench. Parker's fighting compelled the doctor to send him out of Mobile to work at a foundry in New Orleans. But even there, the hostility of others in the shop resulted in his dismissal. Exasperated, the doctor refused to protect Parker any longer and determined to sell him as a field hand. Desperate, the young slave decided to take matters into his own hands and pleaded with a widowed patient of the doctor's to assume his ownership and allow him to purchase his freedom, agreeing to repay her the sum of $1,800 on installments from his earnings as a moulder. Finding work again in Mobile, Parker was able in just a year and a half to accomplish his life's goal, making his final payment to the widow at the age of eighteen in 1845.[37]

As he labored passionately toward freedom, Parker's inventive mind flourished. He had been quietly working for some time on a new idea for a circular harrow or "clod smasher," which would benefit farmers moving into new western and Gulf territories with so much virgin land to break up.

> [O]n my own time I secretly made a model. It looked so good I showed it to the superintendent, who took it so much to heart, I never saw my model again. I went to the owner of the foundry, who in turn called in the superintendent. In my presence the superintendent claimed both the idea and model were his, and that I had nothing to do with the development of the machine. The words were hardly out of his mouth when I had him by the throat. If I had been [in] normal [circumstances], I never would have done such a senseless thing like that. But I had hopes that my invention would not only pay me out of slavery, but give a start when I was free.[38]

Parker eventually would patent the invention, but not for four decades, although for many years he was able to benefit from its production and sale in his own shop. As it was, upon securing his freedom, Parker left Mobile and made his way to New Albany in Indiana and then on to Cincinnati where he worked as an iron molder and in 1848 married Miranda Bouylden, a native of that town.

Parker's first, quite reluctant, experience with runaway slaves occurred while in Cincinnati. Asked repeatedly by a freeman of the city to help him rescue two runaway girls, Parker at last acquiesced and the pair of "conductors" traveled upriver to the small town of Ripley and beyond to Maysville, Kentucky where the girls were located. Narrowly accomplishing the escape with aid from Ripley's Underground agents, Parker's first adventure prompted him to settle permanently in Ripley, which he

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[37] Louis Weeks, "John P. Parker: Black Abolitionist Entrepreneur, 1827-1900" in Ohio History 80 No. 2 (1971), 158-159.

[38] Sprague, His Promised Land, 43.

did with his family about 1849 or 1850, and for the next decade and a half he labored for the fugitive slave in the "borderland" in and around that small river town.[39]

Parker's heroic captures and his fearless attitude in the face of belligerent and threatening slave catchers gained him local notoriety. As with other Ripley abolitionists, especially John Rankin, a bounty was placed on Parker's head by angry slave owners from the border state of Kentucky. Threats to his life did not dissuade him from continuing the crusade, however. Even after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, when the attitude of the town's people of Ripley grew more critical of Underground Railroad activity and when detection and capture meant confiscation of property, a fine, and jail sentence, Parker never tired of his work, only becoming more secretive than ever. He recalled keeping a diary which gave the names, dates and circumstances of all the slaves he had helped run away, which early on numbered 315. But since he had accumulated considerable property by this time, he threw the diary into the iron furnace "as a matter of safety...for fear it might fall into other hands."[40] Ultimately, it is believed that Parker may have helped liberate more than one thousand slaves from the borderlands along the Ohio River.

Despite the restrictions and prejudices against African-Americans in antebellum Ohio, a few black businessmen and real estate owners did in fact prosper in some of the state's larger metropolitan areas and smaller cities in the southern half of the state.[41] John P. Parker was one such man. While by night stealing away across the Ohio River to aid fugitive slaves on the last leg of their journey to free territory, by day Parker was a successful businessman and entrepreneur. He worked at the iron foundry of Thomas and William McCague for a time after coming to Ripley and soon became proprietor of that operation. The foundry operation was likely constructed in part by about 1853, as a deed of mortgage to William McCague for that year mentions specifically lot number sixty seven in the town of Ripley, "with all and singular the appurtenances, together with & including the steam engine, boiler and all the tools implements & finishing machinery, patterns and all the fixtures and appurtenances & implements to the said steam engine, boiler, finishing machinery foundry & blacksmith shop on said premises."[42] Later known as the Phoenix Foundry, Parker purchased the facility from William McCague in 1865 while in partnership with William Hood.

By concentrating on his dealings with fugitive slaves, Parker's own memoir ignores the business and entrepreneurial side of his life. Although more is known of Parker's antislavery activities in the antebellum period than his business successes, in the years following the Civil War his business is known to have flourished, though at times barely weathering the economic downturns of the late nineteenth century. According to Sanborn fire insurance maps drawn in the 1880s and 1890s for the village of Ripley, Parker's machine shop was located immediately adjacent to his residence. Behind the machine shop was the coal-powered foundry and a blacksmith shop. A fire in August 1889 appears to have completely destroyed the foundry, but the machine shop and adjacent house, though probably damaged, survived and were still standing in the 1890s. The foundry operation was subsequently moved a half block west to a site at the corner of Sycamore and Front streets.[43] Known variously as the John P. Parker Foundry, the Phoenix Foundry, and later as the Ripley Foundry and Machine Company, Parker's shop manufactured a wide selection of items including threshing machines, portable engines,

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[39] Ibid., 50.

[40] Ibid., 64.

[41] Knepper, Ohio and Its People, 206.

[42] Brown County, Book of Deeds I, page 34.

[43] Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1890; People's Defender (Union Township), August 8, 1889.

reapers, plows, iron frames for school house seats, sugar mills, and steam engines. Parker patented many of these items himself, placing him in company with the few African-Americans who obtained patents in America before 1900. The clod smasher or soil pulveriser that he had devised while still a slave was finally patented in 1890. His most notable invention, however, was the portable tobacco screw press, patented in April 1885, especially adapted to press tobacco into hogsheads for transport and sale.[44] (See Attachments 1 and 2)

Parker remained in business at the Phoenix Foundry until his death on January 30th, 1900.[45] His principal business by that time was manufacturing tobacco screws. The fire that ruined the foundry in 1889, along with additional economic crises in the decade of the 1890s, probably led Parker to draft a will that forbade his six offspring from carrying on the business. He sent them instead to college and encouraged them toward the attainment of learned professions.

Following Parker's death, the Front Street property passed into the hands of his wife, Miranda.[46] She sold the property shortly thereafter and the house was subsequently used for rental property for a number of years. It is not known when the machine shop was removed from the site. For many years, from the 1940s through the 1980s, the house was used for rental property or storage under the ownership of a coal and oil distributer. Coal was stored on the property behind the house and loaded onto barges pulling right up to the river bank via a conveyor or trestle that passed over Front Street. The house and property were recently purchased by the John P. Parker Historical Society, Inc. The Society intends to restore the house and collect, display, and interpret items dealing with the life and times of John P. Parker, and to utilize the same for educational purposes. More specifically, the Society intends to promote and develop community interest in, and advance the knowledge and appreciation of the life of John P. Parker and African-American achievements on the Underground Railroad in Ohio.

Neither the practical nor the philosophical tenets of John P. Parker's abolitionism are known. He was not an orator or writer as many of his contemporaries, but he spoke loudly for the cause through his commitment to the fugitive slave on the Underground Railroad. A former slave who had bought his own freedom, Parker knew first hand about the evils and degradation of slavery. In his memoirs he spoke articulately about his feelings and attitudes toward that "peculiar" institution. Says Parker, "It was not the physical part of slavery that made it cruel and degrading, it was the taking away from a human being the initiative of thinking, of doing his own ways.... [T]here was not so much brutality in slavery as one might expect. It was an incident to the curse, but the real injury was the making of a human being an animal without hope."[47]

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[44] Specifications for Patents, May 19, 1885, December 9, 1890 (Need citation).

[45] The (Hillsboro, Ohio) Dispatch, February 10, 1900.

[46] Brown County Probate Records, John Parker, Case No. 15696.

[47] Ibid., 4.

John P. Parker, then, was a slave who overcame the institution of chattel slavery. According to Louis Weeks, in a 1971 article about the former slave, Parker was an "unheralded" participant in the Underground Railroad. Against all odds, he advanced his status to that of successful inventor and businessman in the southernmost regions of Ohio. He was for many years an "independent, militant black man in an essentially white power structure of trade and finance."

> In defiance of the slave codes, Parker received a rudimentary education and had access to numerous works of literature and history. Thus, while he was still subjected to the inhumanity of slavery in the United States, he could compare the life he endured with the lives of other persons in other cultures. In addition, he was able to articulate his memories and hopes in a manner seldom possible for the normally illiterate slave, and as a skilled laborer he enjoyed a mobility within the system not usually afforded slaves --even those in the cities of the antebellum South. Significantly, Parker bought his own freedom...and as soon as he was freed, he assisted in the actual liberation of other slaves. His unrecognized work on the Underground Railroad bears out the...thesis that white participation in the movement has been exaggerated while black involvement has been generally overlooked. Parker's willingness to risk his life and property in freeing his brothers and sisters in bondage appears terribly courageous, almost foolhardy, in light of his own vocation and interests; but he does not wish to appear as doing anything different from the vast majority of ex-slaves on the borderlands who cooperated in the enterprise.[48]

According to John Parker, the real warfare against slavery in the borderlands along the Ohio river was waged around the few houses at the top of the river bank on Front Street in Ripley, Ohio. "The occupants of these few homes were the midnight marauders, very secretive and silent in their ways, but trustworthy and friendly to the fugitives." The rescuers were watched by their neighbors, threatened by authorities and frequently betrayed by friends. Their work was done under cover of night and they used all manner of subterfuge to throw slave catchers off their trail. In spite of hardships and beset with difficulties year after year, they performed their work not as a burden but as a duty. And they did perform it well.[49]

Modestly, says Parker, "the real history of these men and this period will never be told, for the principal actors have passed away, leaving here and there stray episodes, which are mere incidents of the real adventure going on behind the scenes. But the strategies resorted to, the ambushes sprung, and the actual hand to hand conflicts between individuals and groups in the Borderland, will never be told, for the simple reason that the men who knew dare not tell what they knew."[50]

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[48] Weeks, "John P. Parker: Black Abolitionist Entrepreneur," 161-162.

[49] Sprague, His Promised Land, 50.

[50] Ibid.

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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.
___ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #_____
___ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #_____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

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

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: approx. 0.4335 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	A 17	252400	4292700

Verbal Boundary Description:

The National Historic Landmark nomination includes the brick house and property situated in J. Poage's Military Survey No. 418, Village of Ripley, Union Township, Brown County, Ohio, being all of lot 66, Part of Lot 67, and part of Lot 76 of the Town of Staunton (now Ripley) as recorded in Clermont County Book 2, Page 123, of the Brown County Deed Records, and being bounded and more particularly described as follows:

Beginning at an iron pin set at the southwesterly corner of said Lot 66 at the intersection of the easterly line of Front Street and the northerly line of an alley; thence from said beginning point and with the easterly line of Front Street and the westerly line of Lot 66 and continuing with the westerly line of Lot 67 North 27 degrees 15 minutes 00 seconds West a distance of 101.58 feet to an iron pin set; thence on a new division line through said Lot 67 and Lot 76 North 66 degrees 48 minutes 31 seconds East a distance of 194.00 feet to an iron pin set on the westerly line of Easton Alley (formerly the O.R.C. railroad right of way) and the easterly line of Floyd W. Brookbank, Jr.; thence on a division line through said Lot 76 and the common line of said Easton Alley and said Brookbank, on a curve to the left having a radius of 1799.60 feet, an interior angle of 01 degrees 19 minutes 50 seconds, an arc length of 41.80 feet, a chord bearing of South 31 degrees 15 minutes 23 seconds East for a chord distance of 41.80 feet to an iron pin set on the northerly line of Lot 77; thence with the northerly line of said Lot 77 South 66 degrees 48 minutes 31 seconds West a distance of 16.92 feet to the common corner of said Lots 66, 67, 76, and 77; thence with the common line of said Lot 66 and Lot 77 South 27 degrees 15 minutes 00 seconds East a distance of 60.00 feet to an iron pin set at the southeasterly corner of said Lot 66 and the southwesterly corner of said Lot 77 and on the northerly line of an alley; thence with the southerly line of said Lot 66 and the northerly line of said alley South 66 degrees 48 minutes 31 seconds West a distance of 180.00 feet to the place of beginning, containing 0.2473 Acres in Lot 66, 0.1714 Acres in Lot 67, and 0.0148 Acres in Lot 76 for a total area of 0.4335 Acres, more or less.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated property includes the former home and archaeological remains associated with John Parker and his foundry operation during the period of significance. The NHL boundaries coincide with property boundaries as specified in the 1996 deed of purchase to the John P. Parker Historical Society.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

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Date: July 15, 1996