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Pre-AP US/World History

James Curry

With the expansion of slavery in the 1800s, it was a lot harder to be a free African American in the United States. Many looked to escape from their owners and attempt to live a free life.

Through the use of the underground railroad, many pursued the dreams of being independent and free. James Curry, a slave himself, looked to escape using the Underground railroad through Fall River to get to Canada, and this is his story:

James Curry: Hello, I am James Curry. I was born in Person County, North Carolina. My mother, Moses Chambers, was also a slave, and the daughter of a white man and a slave. I grew up as a servant, and actually got along well with the master's children. Some of the things witnessed were awful, such as other slaves being beaten and tortured. After the age of sixteen, they put me to the field to work during spring and summer. During autumn and winter I worked in the hatter's shop with my uncle. I always wanted to be a free man, but that was something I would never dare to say in front of a white man. I would always tell them I did not want to be free if they asked. I knew once I was old enough, I would want to become a free man just like my father was.

When I reached my twentieth year, I began an attachment to a free colored girl. I wanted to get married to her, and asked my master for consent. He ultimately denied and threatened to punish me. I did not believe he would kill me because he needed me, and so we got married. After a couple months of my master not saying anything, he would then attack me saying I

should not marry a free woman, and that he separate us. He then threatened me again, and I told him I would rather die than to be separated from her. I knew he would not kill me and he even said he wouldn't himself.

Not too long later, I realized I wanted to achieve my goal of becoming a free man. The opportunity showed itself when my master was heading to Alabama. I knew it was my chance to head north. My brothers and I took horses and told my wife I would send for her eventually. We then started our journey to freedom. One day, after a meal, we decided to bring some food with us. Several white men were upset by this and ordered their dogs to chase after us. My brothers ran off in another direction as the dogs continued after them. I never saw them more. "O! Then I was most miserable, left alone, a poor hunted stranger in a strange land-my brothers gone."

After travelling to many places and finding I was not free nor could I send for my wife from here, I decided I would take myself to Canada. I was told the best place to stay until the situation in Canada was clear was Massachusetts. I was sent to Fall River and shall never forget the times there. I was able to rest and meet people who were so kind to a poor fugitive. I will forever be thankful for this city and the people within it. I am finally able to reach the freedom I so longed for from the beginning. Soon I will head for Canada. May god be with me throughout my journey as he has done so far.