

Underground Railroad left mark on campus

BY RENEE DEHART
STAFF WRITER

Sam was a slave in Guilford County nearly 200 years ago. His master, Osborne, was so brutal that even other slaveholders took sympathy on Sam. He decided it was time to run away, and with the help of Quakers Levi and Vestal Coffin, he began his escape.

The trail he took, hoping to reach Indiana, took him through the woods of what is now Guilford College.

The Guilford woods played a key role in aiding runaway slaves to the safe haven of Richmond, Ind., with the help of the Coffin family.

According to Guilford College's Manager of Prospect Research M. Gertrude Beal, in "The Underground Railroad in Guilford County," Addison Coffin, son of Vestal, wrote that the Underground Railroad began in the New Garden woods.

"(Addison) asserted Vestal Coffin originated and operated the first station of the Underground Railroad in America," wrote Beal. "The first passenger on the Underground Railroad, according to Addison, was John Dimrey of New Garden."

Dimrey had been emancipated by his master, but upon his master's death his heirs tried to force him back into slavery.

"Runaway slaves used to frequently conceal themselves in the woods and thickets in the vicinity of New Garden, waiting opportunities to make their escape to the North," wrote Levi Coffin in the compilation "Reminiscences of Levi Coffin," edited by Ben Richmond.

Slaves would hide in the woods for one to two days and soon become friends with the Coffin family.

"I often went out to feed them," wrote Coffin. "Many a time I sat in the thickets with them as they hungrily devoured my bounty and listened to the stories they told



The "Underground Railroad Tree" dates back to before abolition.

lifted many spirits.

"The glorious hope of freedom animated their spirits in the darkest hours and sustained them under the sting of the lash," wrote Coffin.

The path of the Underground Railroad winding through the woods may explain the moniker "Underground Railroad Tree" for the second-largest heritage tree in the state growing in the woods on campus. However, this 300-year-old tree is merely one of many trees that were present in the woods during the time of the Underground Railroad.

While this tree did not play a known role in the Underground Railroad, it is nevertheless significant.

"It was present when the historical events in the woods took place," said Director of the Friends Center and Campus Ministry Coordinator Max Carter. "It is a silent witness to history."

"The Underground Railroad Tree" actually received its name over 100 years after slavery was abolished.

"It was nicknamed that when we began taking tours back to the woods in the 1990s to educate students about the history of the woods and the Underground Railroad," said Carter.

The tree's size alone makes it a significant tree as well.

"It is five feet in diameter," said Carter. "It takes four to five adults circling its base to go clear around it and is 148 feet high."

The Underground Railroad did travel through the New Garden woods, which adds to the College's already rich history.

Upon visiting the tree during an interview with The Guilfordian, Frank Massey, IFP Gifts Discernment Coordinator, shared a personal sentiment.

"This is sacred ground for me," said Massey before approaching the tree. "I can feel the spiritual presence of the past."

SOY UN LIDER

Soy un Lider conference shows increasing attendance, helps young students

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

sense then what my counselor had been (saying and) I met Irving Zavaleta ... who today is still a great friend. He inspired me to say 'Yes, it is possible' ... SuL gave so much,



how (couldn't) I ... help today? I am (a) result of the conference."

"I would have loved something like this," said volunteer and senior Adriana Vazquez. "I've been working with SuL for the past few years, and I really believe in it."

"It's something Guilford should be proud to host," said volunteer and sophomore Teresa Bedzigui. "It gives (students) a platform to ask questions they might not have the ability to ask (elsewhere)."

Talking to the students who attended the conference was a very powerful experience. They all want the same thing: a chance to succeed.



Soy un Lider prepares Latino high school students for college. The conference hopes to increase the number of Latino students attending college in the area.

"It will help me in the future with picking colleges," said Aron Escalero, who attended the SuL conference.

Attendee Zeke Gutierrez said he wants "to become aware (of) opportunities."

"I want to learn about colleges ... costs and scholarship," said Jasmine Vivar, another attendee of the conference.

The programs run during the conference taught just that. One workshop entitled "Making the Right Choice" was designed to help the students decide what they were looking for in a school. Taught by high school teacher Ashlea Hitchcock, the workshop made students question what they were looking for.

"You never know what will happen," said Hitchcock.

Hitchcock also encouraged undocumented students, letting them know what they can do to go to school without fear of deportation. For a lot of these students, knowing how to do that is a huge weight off their shoulders.

What does this conference mean for the Latino community?

"For many Latino families, to see their children graduate high school and college is a big deal," said Oliva. "(It) makes them proud as any other parents ... Many Latino families coming from third



The number of students participating in the conference is steadily increasing.

world countries did not have the opportunity to have (the) education we do in America. For them to see their children achieve what they on(ce) wished to achieve is even a bigger deal (than for most)."

So what makes this conference a success?

"By the end of the day, (the kids) feel equipped with knowledge and prepared to begin the application process," said Tejada. "The increasing number of students participating in the conference each year is a good indication that the conference is successful."