



Escape Betwixt Two Suns: A True Tale of the Underground Railroad in Illinois (Shawnee Books)

Carol Pirtle

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Although the northern Illinois chapters of the story of Susan “Sukey” Richardson’s escape from slavery on the Underground Railroad are documented, the part played by southern Illinois in that historic episode has remained obscure. Carol Pirtle changes that with her investigation into the 1843 suit Andrew Borders lodged against William Hayes, charging his neighbor with helping slaves from the Borders estate escape to Galesburg. In conjunction with her probe into the past, Pirtle also discovered the Hayes correspondence.

Pirtle documents Hayes’s involvement in the Illinois Underground Railroad through approximately two hundred letters received by Hayes from the early 1820s until his death in 1849. Many of these letters specifically corroborate his participation in the escape of slaves from the Borders estate. One such letter came from T. A. Jones in 1843: “You Dear Sir are to me an unknown friend, yet I believe you are a friend to the poor down trodden Slave. This is as good an introduction as I want from any man. My brother, our cause is a holy one.” Letters written by Galesburg residents show that several prominent citizens of that community also assisted in the affair, proving that Knox College administrators and trustees were active in the Underground Railroad.

Pirtle also includes excerpts from the trial transcript from the 1844 civil case against Hayes, which was tried in Pinckneyville, Illinois. She researched newspaper accounts of the event, most notably those in the *Western Citizen* and the *Sparta Herald*. Records of the Covenanter Presbyterian church of which Hayes was a member provide partial explanations of Hayes’s motives.

Telling the story of Hayes and his involvement with Susan Richardson and the Underground Railroad, Pirtle provides insight into the work of abolitionists in Illinois. *Escape Betwixt Two Suns*, in fact, is one of the few books to substantiate the legends of the Underground Railroad. She tells the story of a quiet man who made a difference, of a man deserving the accolades of a hero.

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