



Charles H. Wright Museum
of African American History

RESEARCH

William W. Harwood Farm



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William Webb Harwood was one of the founding fathers of Ypsilanti as well as an active worker on the Underground Railroad. His house still stands, with one of its hiding spots in the basement revealed during restoration in 2006. Harwood was close friends with fellow Underground Railroad agent Asher Aray, an African American neighbor. The Harwoods and Arays are buried in the cemetery behind the house.

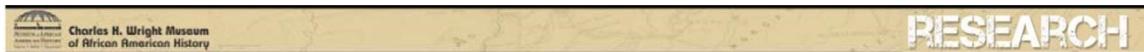
The Michigan Historic Site plaque at Textile and Campbell Roads in Ypsilanti reads:

This peaceful parcel of land, named for the family who donated it, is the final place of a key figure in the founding of Ypsilanti as well as prominent participants in the Underground Railroad. William Webb Harwood came to the area from Palmyra, New York with his wife, Sally and their children in 1824. With Augustus Woodward and John Stewart, Harwood platted the village of Ypsilanti. In 1829, he erected a dam and established a grist mill and, the following year, built Ypsilanti's first schoolhouse. Moving to Pittsfield Township in the mid-1830s, Harwood became a supporter of the abolitionist movement and offered sanctuary to escaping slaves. In this endeavor, he was joined by Asher Aray, a man of mixed race whose family farmed east of the Harwoods on the Chicago Road (now US-12). Aray sheltered a group of 28 slaves whose flight to freedom was documented nationwide. The Arays and their relatives, the Days, are both buried here in an unusual tolerance for the time. Harwood Cemetery, once the central burial ground for Pittsfield Township, also contains the remains of Robert and William Geddes, two of the area's original land patentees.

Harwood also built a Wesleyan Methodist Church behind his property when the Wesleyan Methodists split from the core Methodist Church that condoned slave owners. Historian Carol Mull points out that "Harwood was part of the network of Wesleyan Methodists who helped on the Underground Railroad" across the State of Michigan (Mull 75). Like John Geddes, John Allen (the founder of Ann Arbor) and Judge Samuel Dexter, William Harwood was a prominent figure in Washtenaw County who influenced the community with strong antislavery convictions (Mull 22-24). Between the cellar stairs and crawl space in Harwood's basement is a hollow compartment that could hold one or two people standing upright (Mull 134-135). The Harwood Farm House and interracial Harwood Cemetery remain intact today.

Works Cited & Further Reading

Mull, Carol. *The Underground Railroad in Michigan*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010.



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