

NARRATIVE
OF
THE LIFE
OF
J. D. GREEN,
A RUNAWAY SLAVE,
FROM KENTUCKY,

CONTAINING AN
ACCOUNT OF HIS THREE ESCAPES,
In 1839, 1846, and 1848.

EIGHTH THOUSAND.

HUDDESFIELD:
PRINTED BY HENRY FULFORD, BACK HOUSE YARD.
1864.

Runaway Slave Narrative

Jacob D. Green was born a slave in Maryland on August 24, 1813. For his biography, visit <https://enslaved.org>, click on Stories, and type Jacob Green in the search bar. Also access a timeline of key events in his life.

During the 1830's and 1840's, Mr. Green made multiple attempts to escape slavery. In the following excerpt from his *Narrative of the life of J.D. Green, a runaway slave, from Kentucky**, he describes how he finally makes it to Canada in 1848:

After working in Tennessee three years and seven months, my master hired me to Mr. Steele. This gentleman was going to New Orleans, and I was to act as his servant, but I contrived to get away from him, and went to the house of a free Black named Gibson, and after working four days on the levy (or wharf) I succeeded in secreting myself in a ship, well supplied by Mr. Gibson and friends with provisions, and in the middle hold under the cotton I remained until the ship arrived at New York; my being there was only known to two persons on board, the steward and the cook, both [Blacks]. When the vessel was docked in the pier thirty-eight, North River, I managed to make my way through the booby hatch on to the deck, and was not seen by the watchman on board who supposed I was a stranger, or what they call a "River Thief." I made a jump to escape over the bow and fell into the river; but before he could raise an alarm, I had reached the next dock, got out and made my way off as fast as possible. I wandered about the streets until morning, not knowing where to go, during which time my clothes had dried on my body. About ten o'clock in the forenoon I met with a [Black] man named Grundy, who took me to his house, and gave me something to eat, and enquired where I came from and where I belonged; I hesitated about telling my true situation, but after considerable conversation with him, I ventured to confide in him, and when I had given him all the particulars, he took me to the underground Railway office and introduced me to the officials, who having heard my story determined to send me to Canada, forty dollars being raised to find me clothes, and pay my fare to Toronto, but I was only taken to Utica, in the State of New York, where I agreed to stop with Mr. Cleveland and coachman.

In November I was sent to Post Street on an errand, where I saw my master, who laid hold of me, and called to his aid a dozen more, when I was taken before a magistrate, and that night I was placed in prison, and next day brought before a court, and ordered to be given up to my master. I was taken back to prison that afternoon, and irons placed on my ankles, and hand-cuffed; but, previous to leaving, Mr. Cleveland and family came to take a kind leave of me, and gave me religious advice and encouragement, telling me to put my trust in the Lord, and I was much affected at his little girl, who, when I was placed in the wagon, screamed and cried as if she would fall into fits, telling her father to have me brought back, for these men intended to murder me. The wagon drove to the railway depot, and I was placed in the cars, and at three o'clock we started for Buffalo, where I was placed on the steamboat *Milwaukie*, for Chicago, Illinois, on Lake Erie. The next night I arrived in Cleveland, and was taken from the boat, and placed in prison, until my master was ready to proceed. While in prison a complaint was made that a fugitive slave was placed in irons, contrary to the law of the state of Ohio, and after investigation, my irons were ordered to be taken off. On the Monday following I was taken on board the steamboat *Sultana* bound for Sandusky, Ohio, and on my way there, the Black people, in large numbers, made an attempt to rescue me, and so desperate was the attack, that several officers were wounded, and the attempt failed. I was placed in the cabin, and at dinner time the steamboat started, and had about half a mile to go before she got into the lake, and, on the way, the captain came down to me, and cautiously asked me if I could swim—I answered I could, when he told me to stand close by a window, which he pointed out, and when the paddle wheels ceased I must jump out. I stood ready, and as soon as the wheels ceased I made a spring and jumped into the water, and after going a short distance, I looked up and saw the captain standing on the promenade deck, who, when he saw I was clear of the wheels, waved a signal for the engineer to start the vessel. I had much difficulty in preventing myself from being drawn back by the suction of the wheels, and before I had gone far I saw my master and heard him shout, "Here, here, stop captain; yonder goes my n _____," which was echoed by shouts from the passengers; but the boat continued her course, while I made my way as fast as possible to Cleveland lighthouse, where I arrived in safety, and received by an innumerable company of both Blacks and whites. I was then sent to a place called Oberlin, where I remained a week, and from there I went to Zanesville, Ohio, where I stopped for four months, when I was taken up on suspicion of breaking the windows of a store, and while in prison I was seen by a Mr. Donelson, who declared to the keeper that I belonged to him. I knew him well as the father-in-law of Mr. Steele, with whom I travelled to New Orleans. He was also a Methodist minister. He had me discharged by paying the damage, and making affidavit that I was his slave, I was placed in prison, and kept in two weeks, when I was brought before the court for trial; and Mr. Donelson procured papers showing that he had purchased me as a runaway. I therefore saw it was of no use prolonging the matter, and I acknowledged myself. I was then taken and put into the stage and taken to Cincinnati, Ohio, where I was placed upon the steamboat *Pike*, No. 3, taken to Louisville, Kentucky, and there placed in prison a week, and on Thursday brought out to auction and sold to Mr. Shas Wheelbanks for 1,050 dollars, with whom I remained about twelve months, and acted as coachman and waiting in the house. Upon a Saturday evening, my master came and told me to make my carriage and horses so that he could see his face in them, and be ready to take my young mistress, Mary, down to Centreville, to see her grandmother. So I prepared my horses and carriage, and on Monday was ready. The lady got in, and when about seven miles I drove into a blind road, distant about two miles from any house, where I made the horses stand still, and I ordered Miss Mary to get out: and when she asked me why, I thundered out at the top of my voice, "Get out, and ask no questions." She commenced crying, and asked if I was going to

kill her. I said "No, if she made no noise," I helped her out, and having no rope, I took her shawl and fastened her to a tree by the roadside; and for fear she should untie the knot and spread the alarm, I took off her veil, and with it tied her hands behind her. I then mounted the box, and drove off in the direction of Lexington, and at a place called Elton I stripped the horses of their harness and let them go. I made my way to Louisville and arrived about 7 o'clock in the evening. I walked about the dock until No. 3, the same vessel before spoken of, was nearly ready for starting and I got a gentleman's trunk on my shoulder and went on board, and when I had been paid six cents for carrying the trunk I watched a chance, and jumped down the cotton hold and stowed myself away among the cotton bags and the next day was in Cincinnati, Ohio, where I arrived about daylight in the morning. I waited until the passengers had left the boat and saw neither officer nor engineer about when I ventured to go on shore. On starting up the hill I met my master's nephew, who at once seized hold of me, and a sharp struggle ensued. He called for help but I threw him and caught a stone and struck him on the head, which caused him to let go, when I ran away as fast my legs could carry me, pursued by a numerous crowd, crying "stop thief." I mounted a fence in the street, and ran through an alley into an Irishman's yard, and through his house, knocking over the Irishman's wife and child, and the chair on which she sat, the husband at the time sat eating at the table, jumped into a cellar on the opposite side of the street without being seen by anyone. I made my way into the back cellar and went up the chimney, where I sat till dark, and at night came down and slept in the cellar. In the morning the servant girl came down into the cellar, and when I saw she was Black I thought it would be best to make myself known to her, which I did, and she told me I had better remain where I was and keep quiet, and she would go and tell Mr. Nickins, one of the agents of the underground Railway. She brought me down a bowl of coffee and some bread and meat, which I relished very much, and that night she opened the cellar door gently, and called to me to come out, and introduced me to Mr. Nickins and two others, who took me to a house in Sixth Street, where I remained until the next night, when they dressed me in female's clothes, and I was taken to the railway depot in a carriage—was put in the car, and sent to Cleveland, Ohio where I was placed on board a steamboat called the *Indiana*, and carried down Lake Erie to the city of Buffalo, New York, and the next day placed on the car for the Niagara Falls, and received by a gentleman named Jones, who took me in his carriage to a place called Lewiston, where I was placed on board a steamboat called *Chief Justice Robinson*. I was furnished with a ticket and twelve dollars. Three hours after starting I was in Toronto, Upper Canada, where I lived for three years and sang my song of deliverance.

You can download a free pdf of the *Narrative* from the Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division.

* Jacob D. Green, *Narrative of the life of J.D. Green, a runaway slave, from Kentucky : containing an account of his three escapes, in 1839, 1846, and 1848*, originally published 1864 in Huddersfield, England, and printed by Henry Fielding, pages 31-34.