

Path To Freedom: Underground Railroad Tour - Learn About Area's Ties To Underground Railroad

September 29 2021 9:47 AM



ALTON — Take a journey on the infamous Underground Railroad in Alton, IL during a two-hour guided shuttle tour and sponsored by the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau. Tickets are still available for the next tour, Saturday, Oct. 9.

Seats are available for the 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 9 Underground Railroad Tours which will feature renowned Underground Railroad historian J.E. Robinson. The shuttle tours begin at the Alton Visitors Center, 200 Piasa St. Tickets are \$27.50 per

person. Tickets can be purchased online at <https://www.riversandroutes.com/things-to-do/buy-tickets/>. Advance ticket purchase is suggested due to the popular nature of the tour.

Tickets are also available for additional Underground Railroad tours on Saturday, Oct. 23, and Nov. 6 and 13.

“The Alton area has a great Underground Railroad history,” Cory Jobe, President, and CEO of the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau notes. “These tours bring that part of the region’s history to life and people are able to see for themselves the places throughout the city that served as part of the Underground Railroad network.”



Mr. Robinson will be the conductor on these journeys taking visitors to sites scattered throughout Alton and Godfrey where escaped slaves took refuge as they worked their way to freedom over 150 years ago. While there were no railroad tracks or trains present on the Underground Railroad, the effort to find freedom from slavery resulted in a series of deliberate and organized safe places for those escaping bondage. Located in the free state of Illinois, Alton’s riverfront location along the Mighty Mississippi played a vital role in helping slaves make connections to freedom in the northern U.S. Scattered throughout Alton and surrounding areas, remnants of this period in history still exist.

New Bethel-Rocky Fork AME Church, which is located in Godfrey, originated before the Civil War when free people and slaves crossed the Mississippi River to begin life in

Illinois, which was a free state. According to the National Park Service, as early as 1816, Rocky Fork Church was one of the first Free State stops for slaves escaping Missouri. In the 1830s, a more organized Underground Railroad route was established through the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This area continued to serve as both a way stop and escape community after the Missouri Emancipation Proclamation of 1865.

Alton's Union Baptist Church is one of the oldest Black churches in Illinois. It was populated by free Blacks and organized in 1836. John Anderson, Union Baptist's founding pastor, was Alton abolitionist newspaper editor Elijah P. Lovejoy's pressman prior to Lovejoy's death in 1837 by an anti-abolitionist mob.

For more information on the Underground Railroad shuttle tours please contact the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau at (618) 465-6676 or go to www.RiversandRoutes.com.

The Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau is a certified Destination Marketing Organization serving Madison, Jersey, Calhoun, Macoupin, Montgomery, and Greene counties. The bureau is dedicated to educating visitors about the region by providing information regarding the area's history, unique landmarks, recreational opportunities, leisure attractions, special events, and scenic marvels.