



# Path To Freedom: Underground Railroad Tours

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ALTON - Take a journey on the infamous Underground Railroad in Alton, IL during a two-hour guided shuttle tour sponsored by the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau. Tickets are available now for tours that begin in April and run through November.

Two tours a day are scheduled for April 30, May 14, June 4, Sept. 17, Oct. 22, and Nov. 5. All tours take place on Saturdays at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Renowned Underground Railroad historian J.E. Robinson will lead each tour.

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 required due to the popular nature of the tour. Tickets must be purchased online.

“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.

The Alton region is part of the National Park Service's "Network to Freedom" passport program. This passport stamp honors the Underground Railroad sites in Alton and Godfrey. Passport holders can receive have their passports stamped at the Alton Visitor Center.

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](http://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.*