

"[Peter and Sarah Lerich] were both strong anti-slavery people and did all they could to further the cause. There is an interesting fact that has never been made public, and is known to only two or three of the family. The farm at Springhill, while occupied by them, was for over 25 years, part of the "Underground Railway" system by which thousands of slaves were enabled to make their way to Canada, the Land of Freedom to them. It was a very risky and serious matter in those days to aid a slave from his master, many paying the penalty with their lives. Mr. and Mrs. Lerich cheerfully took the risks and often times had from four to ten slaves hidden in the well on their farm where they were fed and cared for until they could be removed with safety to the station. The old tree that so long ago marked the site of the well is not what it was then. For over a quarter of a century, these two brave, big hearted and kindly souls took in and helped thousands of their fellow beings in their efforts to escape from a life of bondage and suffering."

An excerpt from Peter Lerich's Obituary
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UNDERGROUND RAILROAD SCULPTURE

The sculpture stands along Battle Creek's Linear Park, adjacent to the Kellogg House between Capital Avenue and Division Street. It honors the thousands of slaves who ventured north to seek freedom during the 1800s. It also pays tribute to the Underground Railroad "conductors" who helped the fugitives gain safe passage.



During the period of 1850 to 1864, Spring Hill Farm served as a "station" on the Underground Railroad, where Peter and Sarah Lerich helped unknown numbers of slaves along their journey to freedom. While Detroit was the main route to Canada, it was often too closely watched by agents of the slave owners; therefore, the route was shifted north through Macomb County to Port Huron.

Mr. Lerich enlarged the farm's spring house to form a cave capable of hiding several people and carefully concealed the entrance by the planting of vines. To mark the location of the spring house, Mr. Lerich and several neighbors planted a large cedar tree atop the spring. Known as the "Beacon Tree", the cedar tree became a landmark for slaves on their route to Canada, as it stood 24 miles directly north of the Detroit City Hall and 12 miles directly east of the Pontiac Court House.

Spring Hill Farm served as a "station" on the Underground Railroad.

*When the Sun comes back
And the first quail calls
Follow the Drinking Gourd.*

*For the old man is a-waiting for to carry you to freedom
If you follow the Drinking Gourd.*

*The riverbank makes a very good road
The dead trees will show you the way,
Left foot. Peg foot, traveling on,
Follow the Drinking Gourd.*

*The river ends between two hills
Follow the Drinking Gourd.
There's another river on the other side
Follow the Drinking Gourd...*

HIDDEN MESSAGES OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Messages of the Underground Railroad were hidden in quilts and songs, directing slaves to freedom. Code words were used in songs to disguise their messages, such as in "Follow the Drinking Gourd" (left) which refers to the north star. Quilt patterns, such as the Log Cabin pattern (right), were also used to convey messages to escaping slaves. (Photo from *Hidden in Plain View* by Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, Ph.D.)



Adapted from materials collected by the Shelby Township Historical Committee.



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