

Underground Station
Henry County
33.1976.1

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Marker Text

Seth Hinshaw, (1787-1865), well-known abolitionist, operated a station of the Underground Railroad on this site, prior to the Civil War. He also operated a store in which he refused to sell goods produced by slave labor. In 1843, Hinshaw helped erect Liberty Hall, which was located one block west of this site, where many fiery anti-slavery meetings were held under his direction.

Marker Report

Underground Railroad markers are inherently difficult to support with primary sources. The people involved left little record as their activities were illegal at the time. That said, while this marker has problems, overall it is significant and much of it is correct. However, it needs much more in-depth research.

The 1860 Census recorded Seth Hinshaw's age as 73, which would make his birth year about 1787, as given on the marker. However, his obituary in the *New Castle Courier* gave his death date as November 15, 1865 and his age as 79. This would have made his birth year 1786, not 1787. Another source is needed to determine the correct year.

The main sources of information for the Underground Railroad in Henry County is Thomas D. Hamm's *The Anti-Slavery Movement in Henry County, Indiana: A Study of the Local Abolitionists* (1975). Hamm recognizes Hinshaw as a "well-known abolitionist" who "operated a station of the Underground Railroad." However, IHB was unable to confirm whether this site was the actual location of Hinshaw's UGRR station, and consequently, whether Liberty Hall was a block west of the marker. Deed records do show that Hinshaw owned several properties in the county, but further research is needed.

Hamm confirmed that Hinshaw "operated a store in which he refused to sell goods produced by slave labor." This information is also supported by the *History of*

Henry County, Indiana (1884) and an 1883 article from the *New Castle Courier* which was accessed through the Henry County Genealogical Services Web site, <http://www.hcgs.net/sethinshaw.html>.

More problematic, is the marker's claim that "Hinshaw helped erect Liberty Hall." In the first edition of Hamm's *The Anti-Slavery Movement in Henry County, Indiana*, he wrote, "Liberty Hall, a large frame structure built by Nathan Willetts 'for conscience sake' in 1843, 'in the coldest weather man ever saw.'" In the second edition of his book, Hamm attributed the building of Liberty Hall to Greensboro abolitionists in general. As an authority on the anti-slavery movement in Henry County, IHB wrote to Dr. Hamm for clarification. He replied February 15, 2008, "Contemporary materials about Liberty Hall are few, and I don't know of a primary source that explicitly says that Seth Hinshaw helped build it. But since contemporaries agreed that Hinshaw was at the center of all radical reform activities in Greensboro, I think it a very safe conclusion that Hinshaw was involved in its construction." Hamm's work also confirms the final sentence of the marker.

Under current IHB marker standards, this marker would require much further research. A new marker would give more information about the many other anti-slavery activists and activities in Greensboro, and not focus on Hinshaw exclusively. However, Hinshaw was a major abolitionist, and the marker is very close to correct, considering the difficulty of researching the Underground Railroad.