

By the Kansas Historical Society

## Hardships on the Underground Railroad

Helping slaves to escape was a crime under the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850. This did not stop people in Kansas Territory from helping slaves escape to freedom. Some of them were part of the Underground Railroad, a network of people working together secretly to help escaping slaves. Several routes ran through Kansas Territory. Secret safe houses existed along the routes so travelers would have a place to eat and sleep.

Not much is known about the Underground Railroad network. Those who were part of it knew only a small section, usually from one safe house to the next. This secrecy preserved the identity of the people and of the routes, and made the Underground Railroad a bit safer. Sometimes people wrote about it in letters to their relatives and friends, such as John E. Stewart did in January 1859. Newspapers articles sometimes told about people who were caught working with the Underground Railroad, especially if they were captured helping slaves escape. It is from these records that the hardships and dangers of working and traveling on the Underground Railroad are known today.

John E. Stewart was involved in the Underground Railroad in Kansas. He was a New Hampshire minister and abolitionist who moved his family to Kansas Territory in 1854. Stewart wrote to Thaddeus Hyatt, president of the National Kansas Committee, about raising money to help slaves escape. In the letter Stewart also described some of the difficulties he faced on the Underground Railroad.

*Fliers were posted to promote meetings for the antislavery cause. This one announced that abolitionist John Brown, who was quite active with the Underground Railroad, was to be executed.*

