

Information

The Underground Railroad was a system of people and safehouses that helped runaway slaves as they made the long, dangerous journey North to freedom. To keep freedom seekers and themselves safe from slave catchers and others who didn't approve of their actions, the Underground Railroad was kept secret and code words were used for extra protection. There's a lot that we still don't know about the Underground Railroad like how many stations (safehouses) there were, how many conductors (people helping) there were, or even how many slaves used the Underground Railroad to escape, but we do know that North Carolina played a big role. Even before the Railroad was created, North Carolina had gained a reputation as "The Runaway State," where slaves looking for freedom could flee to blend in with free Black populations, and The Great Dismal Swamp near the Virginia border was well known across the country as a safe haven for escaped slaves, Native Americans, and Whites. Quaker communities were the most active in the Underground Railroad, and the Society of Friends in Guilford County, North Carolina helped slaves as early as 1809.

Instructions

Constellation Viewer:

You'll need:

- 1 cardboard tube
- 1 piece of aluminum foil
- 1 flashlight

When freedom seekers were making their way north, the best guide they had was the North Star (also known as Polaris). As long as they followed it, they knew they were heading in the right direction. The North Star is part of the constellation called Ursa Minor, or the Little Dipper. Cover one end of your cardboard tube with aluminum foil and poke holes in the foil in the shape of Ursa Minor using the chart before. Find a dark room or corner and hold a flashlight to the other end of your constellation viewer while you aim it at the wall. Can you spot Polaris?

