



## Levi Coffin Barn Interior with False Bottom Wagon, Fountain City, Indiana, from the series "Underground Railroad"

### Date

2001, printed 2003

### Primary Maker

William E. Williams

### Medium

Gelatin silver print

### Description

The Levi Coffin house is a registered National Historic Landmark. Built in 1839, this Federal style brick home was used as an Underground Railroad station. The false bottom wagon (one of the few extant) was used to transport fugitive slaves. Breathing holes for the secret human cargo can be seen in the bottom section of the wagon. Levi and Catharine Coffin were Quakers who opposed

slavery. They accommodated fugitive slaves on their journey to freedom in the North. The Coffins hid escaping slaves in a secret upstairs room and placed beds in front of the door to conceal the entrance. Fugitives sometimes stayed at the Coffins' home for a couple of weeks to gain enough strength to continue on their journey. The Coffins successfully concealed over 2,000 fugitives and no slaves failed to reach freedom from their house. In 1847, the Coffins moved to Cincinnati so that Levi could operate a wholesale warehouse that supplied goods to free labor stores. The Coffins continued to assist the cause, helping another 1,300 slaves escape. WW: The breathing holes in the bottom section of the wagon that can be seen in this photograph are crucial to understanding the picture and why it was made. The curators of the site gave me unfettered access to the site for nearly eight hours to make this and other pictures. I consider this to be one of the top sites interpreting the Underground Railroad experience in the United States. (SOURCE: Adair, et al., "Uncovering the Path to Freedom" exh. cat, p. 27)

### Dimensions

Sheet: 10 x 8 in. (25.4 x 20.3 cm) Image: 7 9/16 x 7 3/4 in. (19.2 x 19.7 cm)