



Throwback Thursday: Sylvania's Lathrop House

Today's Camp Ah-Ha explores Sylvania's own Lathrop House and its role as part of the Underground Railroad

Who:

- You and your family
- **Parents**, we know the topic of slavery can be difficult to teach and to understand especially for younger children. We hope this brief overview will focus on the importance of our community in the fight to help enslaved people. If you have very young children, you may want to skip this lesson.

What:

- Did you know that Sylvania played a very important role as part of the Underground Railroad?
- The Underground Railroad wasn't a real railroad and it wasn't underground. It was a secret system of people and places that helped thousands of enslaved people escape from slavery just before and during the Civil War.
- Slavery had been in existence in the United States since 1619. By the 1840s, a group of people called Abolitionists called for an end to slavery.
- Abolitionists worked in a lot of ways. Some like Frederick Douglass, himself a former enslaved person, spoke out to large crowds. Some like Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote books like Uncle Tom's Cabin which showed how bad slavery was. Others like Lucian and Larissa Lathrop of Sylvania were a part of the Underground Railroad.
- Lucian Lathrop moved to Sylvania in 1848 with his wife Larissa. By 1850, he had built a large white house on Main Street. Lucian was a minister as well as a State Representative. He

and his wife were also part of the Underground Railroad because they believed slavery was wrong.

- It took many people working secretly to keep the Underground Railroad going. Conductors were people who took the escapees from one stop to another. Harriet Tubman is one of the most famous conductors, although she was never in Sylvania. Stations were places like house or barns where those escaping were hidden. The Lathrop House was a station.
- Behind the Lathrop House is a large, deep ravine. That's like a deep ditch. The ravine provided many natural hiding spots.
- Once the escapees reached the Lathrop House, they were welcomed in by a secret stairway leading to the cellar. In the cellar, was a large fireplace with two bake ovens, one on each side. This fireplace though held a secret. One of the ovens wasn't an oven at all, but instead it was an entrance to a secret room. Escapees could crawl through the fake oven to the secret room and sleep and hide there until it was safe to move to the next stop.
- Ohio was a free state, meaning that slavery was not allowed in our state. But, because of other laws, it was illegal to help slaves escape. The Lathrops risked paying fines or even going to jail if they had been caught helping.
- The Lathrops weren't the only people in Sylvania who were part of the Underground Railroad. David and Clarrissa Harroun were neighbors to the Lathrops. Their barn was also a station. Mr. Harroun created a wagon with a false bottom to transport escapees. They would hide in the bottom of the wagon, and Mr. Harroun would put in the false floor and then pile farm produce in the wagon.
- Because being a part of the Underground Railroad was illegal, people who participated didn't talk about it. It is impossible to know everyone and everyplace who was a part of the Underground Railroad.
- Escapees wanted to end up in the country of Canada because slavery was illegal there throughout the country and no one could come and take them back.
- The Underground Railroad wasn't the only way that people found freedom. Henry Brown mailed himself to freedom in a crate.
- The Civil War was fought to end slavery and in 1865 slavery was ended.

How:

- You can take a walk through Harroun Park and follow the path of the ravine that was the route of the Underground Railroad. (Practice social distancing of course). Did you know that the Lathrop House is open to visit starting in May? You can see the secret room and learn more about the family.
- We have two puzzle sheets to help you remember all the words you have learned.
- You can be proud to be from Sylvania where so much important history happened!
- Henry Box Brown was a real person. You can learn more about his life by listening to his story: Henry's Freedom Box <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6rf9bxDK1o>

Extensions:

- Older children can learn more about Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass and others.
- Sylvania was just one of many stops in Ohio. Visit www.ohiohistory.org and search for Underground Railroad to find out more. The King Farm in Delta, Ohio in nearby Fulton County was another station.
- There have been some maps made of some of the routes through the state <https://www.ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll34/id/8969>
- We have created a reading list of books for all ages and reading levels. You might be able to find more read online by doing a google search of the book title and then 'read aloud'.

