

Hitchcock House



John Hotchkiss spoke at the Treynor Optimist Club on March 9. He is a retired Civil Service and manages the Hitchcock House in Lewis. The Hitchcock House is part of the Underground Railroad network to freedom and a National Historic Landmark. The Underground Railroad helped runaway slaves escape to freedom in Canada.

George Hitchcock moved to Iowa in 1853. He had two brothers who were ministers. He worked in a rock quarry and lost one eye working there. He lived in a log cabin South of Lewis. One day a church member brought some runaway slaves to his house. George decided it was the right thing to do to help runaway slaves.

George built a house of brown sandstone as his house and an Iowa safe house. There were numerous safe houses in Iowa, including towns like Tabor, West Des Moines, and Salem. George built a separate room in the basement, hidden behind a cabinet. There is no record of how many former slaves stayed there, but over 40,000 slaves escaped between 1840 and the end of the Civil War.

There was a bounty on escaped slaves. A male was generally worth \$1000 and a female \$1500. George was never caught hiding slaves.

With the end of slavery, George and his wife moved to Kansas. The Hitchcock house was lived in until the 1960s. The vacant house was vandalized and rapidly deteriorated. The walls were crumbling, the windows broken, and the roof was collapsing.

In 1983 the Hitchcock House Restoration Committee was organized. It has now been restored to its former glory. It has 2 foot thick wall. John and his wife have lived on the property since 2010. John Hotchkiss recently found that he is related to George Hitchcock.

The house is open for tours May 1st through September 30th. It is open 1:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. Tuesday through Sunday. Tours are \$5 per person. There are 35 volunteers signed up to help with tours. They have 2000-2500 visitors each year. The barn is open for free activities.