



THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

"Liberty in Our Grasp" lesson plans were developed through a partnership between the Delaware Historical Society and the Hard History Project with financial support from the State of Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs and M&T Bank.

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Abstract

This lesson is not a starting point but an important supplement. Many students, especially at the middle school level, are unfamiliar with the Second Middle Passage (domestic interstate and inter-regional slave trade) let alone the Reverse Underground Railroad. This lesson is meant to serve as a bridge between lessons about the Underground Railroad on one side and lessons focused on the freedom-seeking enslaved on the other. The apparatus of the enslaver needs to be exposed and explored, both in its legal and non-legal components, to add even greater reverence for and understanding of the individuals who overcame it.

Hard History Framework

- [Summary Objective 9](#): This lesson aligns with Summary Objective 9—Students will describe the principal ways the labor of enslaved people was organized and controlled in what is now the United States.

Delaware History Standards

- **History 2 6-8b (Parts 1 & 2)**: Students will examine historical documents, artifacts, and other materials, and analyze them in terms of credibility, as well as the purpose, perspective, or point of view for which they were constructed.
- **History 2 6-8a (Part 3)**: Students will master the basic research skills necessary to conduct an independent investigation of historical phenomena.

Lesson Objectives

At the end of the lesson:

- Students will be able to identify more concrete examples of the apparatus of the enslaver.
- Students will gain a greater appreciation and reverence for the enslaved who struggled to overcome the legal and non-legal instruments contained in the apparatus of the enslaver.

Lesson Essential Questions

Note: It is recommended that you DO NOT explain what the Reverse Underground Railroad (RUGRR) is until the end of the lesson to clarify student understanding. Best to have the students uncover what it is and then put a name to it.

- **What was the Reverse Underground Railroad and how was it similar to/different from the Underground Railroad (UGRR)?**

Notes

1. As you progress through this lesson, it is of paramount importance to use the correct language to describe enslavement in the United States. I encourage teachers to read the following [source](#) and prioritize using the correct language both verbally and in writing. Furthermore, it is equally important to promote use of this correct language with all students when they are sharing their thoughts, especially in their written responses.
2. This lesson should be placed in the curriculum following a lesson(s) about the Underground Railroad. Once those lessons have concluded, proceed as follows (to aid in sequentially progressing through this lesson, the accompanying slide deck).

PART 1

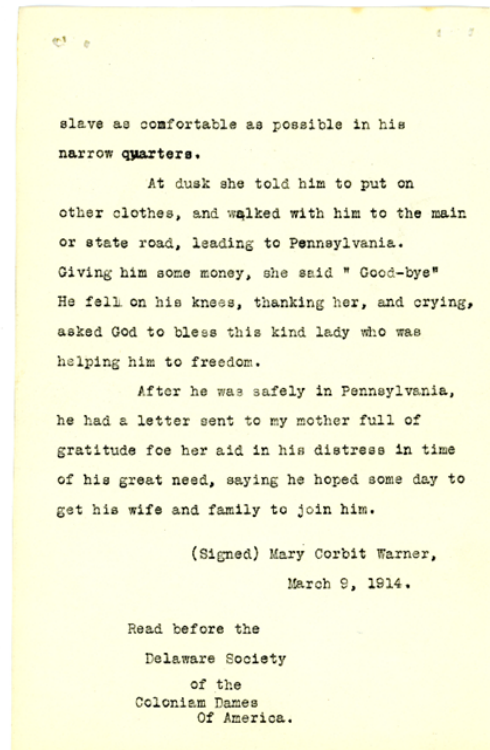
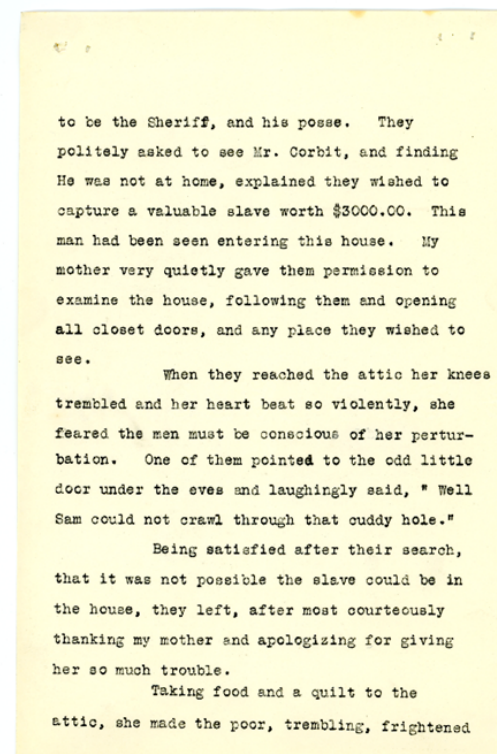
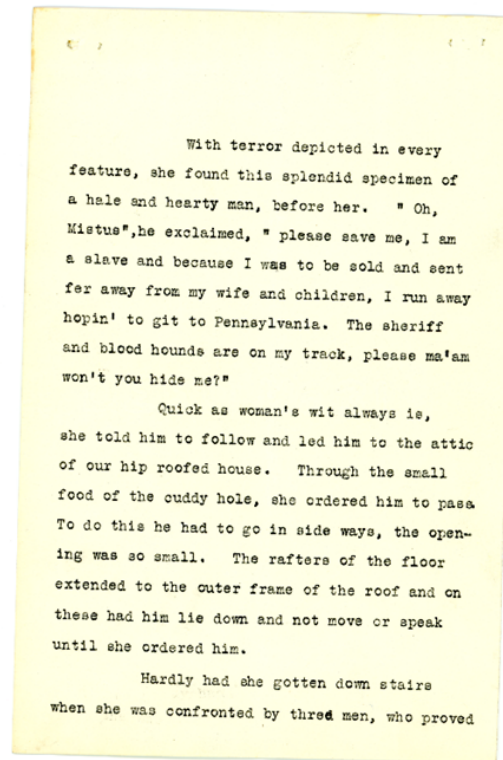
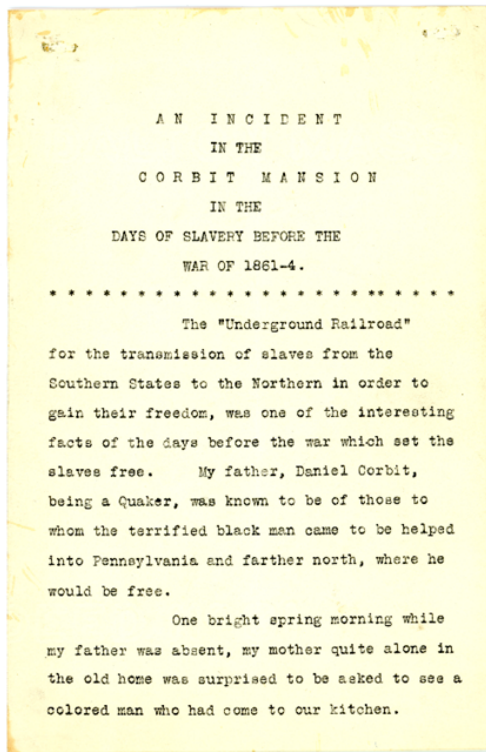
1. Begin by modeling for students historical thinking (in the form of SOURCING) as you read the document, [An Incident in the Corbit Mansion in the Days of Slavery Before the War of 1861–4](#), as a class. (FYI—at times, when SOURCING, questions may not produce answers.) Note: there are four pages to this document, be sure to click the right arrow at the top of the viewing screen to download each page.
 - a. Who wrote this document? (Mary Corbit Warner)
 - b. What is the author's perspective? (She is the daughter of a Quaker man and woman)
 - c. Why was the document written? (It was written as a statement to be read before The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America)
 - i. When reviewing this answer with the students, call their attention to page four as this clearly states the intended audience of the source. However, who were the Colonial Dames of America? Explore [this website](#) with the students and ask, who would be members of the audience for this talk in 1914? Does this change our thoughts on why the story was told?
 - d. When was the document written? (March 9th, 1914)
 - e. Where was the document written? [Delaware...presumably Odessa although this required research beyond the document (see [here](#))]
 - f. Is this document reliable? Why? Why not? How could we corroborate this information? (There is stable credibility for this document since this is the retelling of an incident to be read for a friendly crowd. However, the person telling the story is the daughter and it is unclear if she was a direct witness to the event or if the story was told to her. Possible ways to corroborate: look for a freedom seeker ad from the area and time period, or a letter, diary, etc. that backs this story)

2. At the conclusion of #1, ask the class to explain the story. You may wish to record these on the board.
 - a. Ask, “How is this consistent with what we have learned about the Underground Railroad (UGRR)?”
 - b. What similarities do we see? Differences?
 - c. What does this source say about the humanity of the following?
 - i. The enslaved man
 - ii. Ms. Corbit Warner’s mother
 - iii. The sheriff and his posse
 - iv. The legal system that organized and controlled enslaved people
3. EXTENSION
 - a. Geography – Consider how far it may be for Ms. Corbit Warner’s mother to guide the enslaved man to the state road? What possible dangers may she face?
 - b. Agency – Consider the agency of Ms. Corbit Warner’s mother. Explore the differences between our modern-day society and the pre-Civil War society. Does she have any power to deny the sheriff? What about the choice to help the freedom-seeking enslaved person in the absence of her husband?
 - c. Further investigation – Did Ms. Corbit Warner’s mother tell her this story? How did she learn this information she is sharing many years later? Who is “Sam the slave?” What of his fate?

Part 1 Document

Source: [*An Incident in the Corbit Mansion in the Days of Slavery Before the War of 1861-4*](#)

Click on the document title above to download full size images.



PART 2

4. Break the students into groups. There are six total RUGRR documents, so you may want to have two groups analyze the same source to keep the groups small. Or you may want one group to look at two shorter sources and another group focus on a longer source exclusively. Be aware that many students will be shocked and appalled by the RUGRR.
 - a. Suggestion for student grouping: Groups 1 and 2 examine Source 1, Groups 3 and 4 examine Source 2, etc.
 - b. Consider the virtual option of using Google Jamboard in lieu of physically working in groups.
 - c. Print the following primary sources and provide to students with the [Sourcing Handout](#).
The following documents and sources are from the Delaware Historical Society but can be accessed online via the Delaware Digital Newspaper Project (DDNP). [Click here to learn more about DDNP and the Delaware newspapers that make up Chronicling America.](#)
 - i. [Kidnapped Free Black Man](#)
 - ii. [Delaware State journal. May 17, 1833—Left Column “Mr. Brooks”](#)
 - iii. [Smyrna times. September 02, 1858—Column 4 “Kidnapping”](#)
 - iv. [The Wilmingtonian, and Delaware advertiser. July 20, 1826—Column 5 “Kidnapping”](#)
 - v. [Delaware State journal and statesman. August 28, 1857—Column 3 “Rich Doings at Elkton—The Sheriff...”](#)
 - vi. [The Delaware register, or, Farmers', manufacturers' & mechanics' advocate. May 23, 1829—Column 2 “Patty Cannon”](#)
5. Ask the students to SOURCE the document(s) they have been assigned with their group using the [Sourcing Handout](#). Encourage them to think and make logical inferences, but as stated previously, sometimes there will not be an answer to a SOURCING question.
6. Ask the students to write a brief summary of the story told by their document. You could have the students do this as a group, or individually (teacher preference).
7. Ask each group to vote for a spokesperson.
8. Ask each group’s spokesperson to share their group’s findings. Probe the responses for clarification when necessary.
 - a. After a group shares their document, ask each group, “How is this different from what we have learned about the Underground Railroad (UGRR)? Are there any similarities?”
9. Once each group has shared, lead a class discussion by asking, what did all or most of these documents have in common?
 - a. Record the answers on the board leaving an open space at the top.
 - b. Once answers have been recorded, write “Reverse Underground Railroad” at the top in the open space.
10. Explain to the students that the process of kidnapping free and formerly enslaved African Americans and selling them into slavery has been named the Reverse Underground Railroad.
 - a. Open a discussion with the students using the following prompts:
 - i. What can we understand about the humanity of the enslaved when dealing with the RUGRR?

- ii. What can we understand about the humanity of the kidnapper when dealing with the RUGRR?
- iii. What can we understand about the humanity of the enslaver when dealing with the RUGRR?

11. EXTENTION

- a. How might the RUGRR affect the livelihood of free African Americans?
- b. What effect would the RUGRR have on freedom seekers running for freedom on the UGRR?
- c. Why were DE and MD the epicenter of the RUGRR?
- d. **Extension questions as time allows:** Were the intended audiences of these ads and newspapers African Americans? When did African Americans begin to print their own newspapers? What does this say about society at the time?

Part 2 Documents

- i. [Kidnapped Free Black Man](#) "Look out for the Kidnappers"

counts he was following letter the Morning st intelligence to this article, er letters, of ry interesting took place at 5th December. rkish fleet had elles to winter, Hydriot, Spez- 1 to their re- ors of the Hy- a entering the aving spent all their families ir return, they it demand was in a piratical a was peremp- ates, and they ght to send all two. Enraged sailors took the d them in the decreed to be- wing day in the paid them the

In this situa- l to send infor- of the British e neighborhood d devise some pt. S. landed, npts were made next step was or the Primates o escape, during ding night. But d by the watch-

books to continue open for two days, agreeably to the provisions of said act.

BENJAMIN POTTER,
Chairman of the Commissioners.
S. WILLIAMS, Secretary.
March 16 ---3t

Look out for the Kidnappers.

A FREE NEGRO MAN, named Solomon Sharp, sometimes called Solomon Atkins, was kidnapped by persons unknown, from the house of William D. Atkins, in Indian River hundred, Sussex county, Delaware, on the night of the 22d of February. The said Solomon is the son of Rosannah Chippy, is aged about 22 years, about 5 feet 7 inches high and well made, light complexion for a negro, has but little to say, slow of speech and civil in his deportment; his eyes are large and full, lips thick and nose large and flat. He served his time as a bound boy with Isaac Atkins. It is supposed he has been taken towards Salisbury, and from thence to Norfolk. Any information that may lead to the recovery of this man from the fangs of a set of wretches, will be gratefully received by his distressed mother. Editors to the South, friendly to the rights of humanity, are requested to insert the above in their papers. March 16.

Sheriff's Sale.

By virtue of a writ of vend. exponas to me directed, will be exposed to

Mr. Brooks, the Editor of the Portland Advertiser, whose letters are so universally read, gives the following account of an adventure in Alabama, and of a rencontre with an unfortunate negro who, it seems, had been stolen from this neighborhood. He was travelling in the mail stage, when from the darkness and tempestuousness of the night, the stage was obliged to stop at the first human habitation they could find in the wilderness:

"The hut in which my fellow passengers and myself were put was about ten feet square, made of logs with a bark covering, and with a little door which I was obliged to stoop in order to enter. An old negro slave was the master of this castle, having been hired out to take care of the horses in the stage. He had no bed for himself much less for passengers. He had no food to give us hungry as we were after the jolting we had experienced in the mail cart. His blanket he put at our service, and then after kindling up his pitch pine fire, he had done all he could do. For want of other occupation, I held a talk with the old man. His story is probably the story of many a kidnapped black man in this Southern Country, and therefore may not be uninteresting. He was born a freeman, he told us in Pennsylvania, and lived in New-Castle, Delaware. On visiting a short distance from Delaware, some ten years ago, he was seized by three white men, pinioned or manacled, and then shipped and sold for a slave in Georgia. He coolly remarked that "he should not have cared any thing about, it, but that he had been free and knew what liberty was; it was so sweet." The poor fellow told us a true story, I am confident from his knowledge of the geography of the land where he was born, and I was confirmed in the belief by his assertion, "that he had been a cook on board of a vessel," and therefore was a sailor—and more than this, manifested in his conversation an acquaintance with a sailors life."

KIDNAPPING.—We learn from the *Commonwealth* that some month or two back two negro boys were inveigled into a trap set for the purpose by some as yet unknown individuals in Sussex county, and being secured were kidnapped, carried away and sold into slavery at the South. A distinguished lawyer of that county was consulted in regard to the matter, who immediately put things in train for the discovery of the whereabouts of the boys. Having got on the right track matters were pushed on vigorously, and finally the two negroes were traced to their present location and identified. The gentleman having the matter in charge proceeded to the spot, which is in the neighborhood of Richmond, Virginia, and having seen the boys, and passed through Wilmington a few days ago, on his way to Sussex, for the purpose of obtaining the necessary evidence wherewith to identify the negroes, as will lead to their release and return to home, friends and freedom. The names of the parties engaged in the nefarious business of kidnapping have not yet been given, but will be in the course of a few weeks, and if possible, they will be arrested and tried for the offence against the laws of Delaware.

Norfolk, (Va.) July 13.

KIDNAPPING.—A small schooner, the Sukey, of Vienna, but called by various names by those on board, and commanded by John W. Watson, anchored in our harbor on Monday night last, from Baltimore, having on board two negro women and a child. The names of the women are Lydia Potts and Ann Robertson; the one about 23 the other 38 years old, the child's age is perhaps 3 years. These negroes having been offered for sale by the captain and a man named Elijah Moore, who came in the vessel, information was lodged with one of our Magistrates, and a warrant was immediately issued to bring the parties before him. The order was promptly executed by that active officer, Mr. Cherry, and after an examination, Captain J. Watson, Elijah Moore, and a man named Isaac Dickerson, together with the negroes, were committed for further trial.

The result of the investigation seems to be, that whilst the schooner was lying at Baltimore, Moore enticed Lydia Potts and Ann Robertson on board, under pretence of wishing to engage their services. When the vessel got under way they were, with the child, kept closely confined below, and threatened with violence if they attempted to come on deck. In this situation they were brought to this place and offered for sale, when information was lodged against Moore and Watson, as above stated.

Since writing the above we are informed that Moore has acknowledged that he took the negroes on board at Baltimore, he had previously stated that they belonged to his father. He says his residence is in Somerset County, Md. He is a short, thick set man, about 30 years old, and sometimes calls himself Massey.

RICH DOINGS AT ELKTON—THE SHERIFF OF
 CECIL COUNTY IN LIMBO—STEALING AND SELLING
 A FREE NEGRO.—A most high handed outrage,
 recently perpetrated in Cecil county, has come
 to light within the last few days. We have been
 put in possession of the full particulars of the
 case, which are as follows:—Some time since a
 negro prisoner escaped from the jail at Elkton,
 and John Poole, the sheriff of the county, who
 also fills the office of jailer, proposed to a colored
 boy named Talbott, who turned out to have been
 free, but who was then in his custody, (having
 been confined for disturbing a religious meeting
 in the vicinity of Principio,) to assist him in
 capturing the fugitive. Poole took the boy Tal-
 bott to Richmond, Va., and there offered him for
 sale as a slave; the boy stoutly protested that he
 was free, told where he was from, with whom
 he had formerly lived, &c., but the sheriff as per-
 sistently succeeded in convincing the men with
 whom he was dealing in Richmond that the boy
 was a slave.

Some difficulty, however, arose as to Poole's
 ability to furnish the necessary documents and
 papers to make the sale legal; he left Talbott
 in custody at Richmond and returned to Elkton,
 where it is charged he forged a bill of sale in
 his favor, made out all the necessary papers, and
 fraudulently procured the seal of the county to
 them. Thus armed he returned to Richmond,
 and sold the boy for the sum of \$1050; he re-
 ceived \$150 in cash and a check on a bank for
 the balance. It being after bank hours, the
 check could not be cashed that day, and Poole
 and an accomplice named Beatty becoming
 alarmed, left Richmond suddenly and came on
 to the city, where the check was offered at the
 banking house of Messrs. Johnston Bros. The
 check was presented at the counter by Beatty,
 but as he was a stranger to the firm it was sug-
 gested to him that it would be necessary to
 prove his identity; he started out to procure the
 necessary evidence, leaving the check in the
 hands of the bankers for collection, they giving
 him a receipt for \$901.09. The suspicions of
 certain parties having been aroused, Beatty was
 arrested on the charge of being accessory to the
 kidnapping, and the receipt noted above found
 on his person; this receipt is now in possession
 of Deputy Marshal Manly. Beatty was at once
 arrested, and is now in jail.

On Saturday night, Sheriff Poole was arrested
 in Elkton by Officer Benny of that place, on a
 warrant charging him with kidnapping, issued
 by Justice Gains. In virtue of his office as
 sheriff of the county, he has entire control of
 the jail at Elkton, and therefore to confine him
 in that building would have been to put him
 under his own charge; consequently, he is kept
 confined in a private room in the town. It is
 supposed that the State authorities will take
 some measures for his safe keeping to day, as
 whether guilty or innocent of the charge thus
 brought against him, he will be incapacitated to
 act as sheriff until an investigation has been
 had. We learn that Deputy Marshal Manly,
 armed with the proper authority, left this morn-
 ing in the Southern train for the purpose of
 bringing the boy Talbott back, if it is possible
 to find him. Should the charges brought against
 Poole and Beatty be proven on them, they will
 suffer severely, as the laws of Maryland come
 down very heavily on the crime of kidnapping.

—Balt. Patriot.

PATTY CANNON.

Wilmington, May 19.—We some time since gave a statement respecting certain discoveries which were recently made in Sussex, and of the arrest and imprisonment of Patty Cannon, on the charge of being concerned in the murder of a number of individuals in and near the borders of that County. We inadvertently stated that her trial might be expected to take place about the time of the publication. It was the Court of Common Pleas which was then in session, and by the Constitution of our State the trial for capital offences is confined to the Supreme Court, whose regular session does not take place in that County until August next. Several bills of indictment were found against the old woman, but she has saved the Court the trouble of trying, and perhaps the Sheriff that of performing even a more unpleasant duty, as she died in Jail on the 11th instant.

During our late visit into Sussex County, we heard an anecdote related of the old woman and others connected in the traffic of stealing and selling blacks, which is, perhaps, worth relating. Several black men were employed by the concern, in the business of inveigling negroes into the meshes of their net, and among the rest was one who was exceedingly expert in the business. This individual, upon one occasion, prevailed upon a man who was a slave to a person residing in Worcester County, Md., and had a free wife and seven male children, between the ages of 6 and 18 years, to accompany him to Camden, in this State, with the assurance that he would be able to procure a pass from the members of the Friends Society in that place, with which he would be enabled to pass into the state of New Jersey, and escape from the service of his master. He accordingly conducted him to the house of Patty Cannon, where he was furnished with a document with a large seal to it, and amused with the idea of being furnished with a conveyance to the place of his supposed destination. His conductor then left him, and going immediately back to his wife and children, and telling them a fine tale of the favorable situation their husband and father had procured, induced them to follow him, who were also conveyed into the same trap, and the next morning after their arrival they were all shipped off, never more to be heard of by their relations or friends. This account was furnished to our informer by another black who had been employed in the same business by the despicable concern.

Gazette.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

Sourcing Handout

Write a brief summary of your document

Sourcing Handout

Title of source

When was it written?
What was the date it
was printed/published?

What was the name of
the newspaper? Where
was it published?

Who was the author?
What is their
perspective?

What do you know/can
you find out about the
author from what they
wrote?

Why was this written?

Is this source reliable?
Why? Why not?

PART 3

12. Share the book advertisement, [The Narrative and Confessions of Lucretia P. Cannon, the Female Murderer, 1841](#), image and text with students.
- Examine the images included on the ad with the students.
 - Read the text from the ad with the students.
 - (Optional) SOURCE this document with students. This would be particularly interesting to do given the loaded language used by the author.
 - Ask students, who is Lucretia (Patty) Cannon according to this document?
 - Have students research Patty Cannon using the [Lucretia “Patty” Cannon Research Organizer](#)
 - Here are some suggested sources if you want to limit the student’s choices:
 - [Dorchester County Historical Society, “Patty Cannon”](#)
 - [Delaware Online, “Wickedest woman in America”](#)
 - [Maryland State Archives, “Patty Cannon”](#)
 - Give students time to read a few sources and complete the handout.
 - Once students have concluded their research, ask the students to respond to the [exit ticket](#) prompt at the bottom of the handout.
 - Explain why you think the Narrative and Confessions of Lucretia P. Cannon advertisement doesn’t mention the kidnapping and killing of African Americans.
 - After a few moments have students turn to a seat partner and share their answers.
 - Have a few students share their discussion with the class.
13. Revisit these follow-up questions and ask students if they would like to revise their answers:
- How might the RUGRR affect the livelihood of free African Americans?
 - What effect would the RUGRR have on freedom seekers running for freedom on the UGRR?
 - Why were DE and MD the epicenter of the RUGRR?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

Lucretia “Patty” Cannon Research Organizer

Lucretia “Patty” Cannon Research Organizer	
Who was Patty Cannon?	
Who were Patty Cannon’s associates?	
Where was Patty Cannon from?	
When was Patty Cannon alive?	
What did Patty Cannon do to earn a living? (Explain in detail in your own words)	
Why is Patty Cannon famous or infamous? (Explain in detail in your own words)	

EXIT TICKET: Explain why you think the Narrative and Confessions of Lucretia P. Cannon advertisement doesn’t mention the kidnapping and killing of African Americans.

NARRATIVE AND CONFESSIONS
OF
LUCRETIA P. CANNON,
THE FEMALE MURDERER.



See Narrative, Page 13.

Just Published the thrilling and interesting Narrative and Confession of Lucretia P. Cannon, the Female Murderer, who was a short time since, with two of her Accomplices were tried, condemned, and sentenced to be hung at Georgetown, Delaware, for the commission of several of the most Atrocious, Barbarous and Inhuman murders ever committed by one of the Female Sex, which Sex has always been esteemed as having a higher regard for virtue, and a far greater aversion to acts of barbarity, even in the most abandoned of the Sex, than is generally found in men of the same class. And we may truly say that we have never seen recorded a greater instance of moral depravity, so utterly regardless of every feeling which should inhabit the human breast, as the one it becomes our painful lot to lay before our readers in the accounts of Lucretia P. Cannon, the subject of this truly interesting narrative.

It will be found by the Confessions of this ill-fated woman that she has committed eleven murders with her own hands, besides being accessory to more than a dozen others, the accounts of which will be found in the Narrative. Also, the confession of one of her accomplices, who was afterwards executed for Murder, at Cambridge, Maryland.

As many of the circumstances related in this Narrative are doubtless still fresh in the minds of many of our readers who have been eye-witnesses of the facts, it is therefore needless to make any comment regarding



See Narrative, Page 16.

the truth of this statement, as the facts are too well substantiated to admit of a doubt; and will be found to be well worth the perusal of all, both old and young. And we trust that no parent having daughters who are young and inexperienced, will fail of purchasing one of these Narratives, that they may take example from the fate of this unfortunate female, and early learn to refrain from all pursuits or pleasures that tend in the least to swerve them from the path of virtue.

Price of the Narrative, 12½ Cents.

To be had of the person who will soon call for this paper.