



I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad

Karolyn Smardz Frost

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It was the day before Independence Day, 1833. As his bride, Lucie, was about to be sold down the river, Thornton Blackburn planned a daring and successful daylight escape from their Louisville masters. Pursued to Michigan, the couple was captured and sentenced to return to Kentucky in chains. But Detroit's black community rallied to their cause in the Blackburn Riots of 1833, the first racial uprising in the city's history. Thornton and Lucie were spirited across the river to Canada, but their safety proved illusory when Michigan's governor demanded their extradition. Canada's defense of the Blackburns set the tone for all future diplomatic relations with the United States over the thorny issue of the fugitive slave, and confirmed the British colony as the main terminus of the Underground Railroad.

The Blackburns settled in Toronto, where they founded the city's first taxi business, but they never forgot the millions who still suffered in slavery. Working with prominent abolitionists, Thornton and Lucie made their home a haven for runaways. When they died in the 1890s with no descendants to pass on their fascinating tale, it was lost to history. Lost, that is, until archaeologists brought the story of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn again to light.

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