

## Daring Death for an Idea: J.B. Grinnell and the Underground Railroad By Nicole Etcheson

*Grinnell Herald Register*, Monday, November 21, 1983, page 10

*This article was based on material from the following publications: Josiah Bushnell Grinnell, "Men and Events of Forty Years," D. Lothrop Company, 1891; Des Moines Register, 1927; Grinnell College Scarlet and Black, March 19, 1927; The Grinnell Herald-Register, January 3, 1966 and December 14, 1970; Curt Harnack in The Iowan, July 1956; Charles Payne, "Josiah Bushnell Grinnell," State Historical Society, 1938, and Stephen D. Oats, "To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown," Harper & Row, 1990.*

"No man in America more fully embodies the whole juice and spirit of rampant abolitionism in its present sense, than does J. B. Grinnell," the Iowa City Press wrote in 1862.

J. B. Grinnell earned that reputation for his long career in preaching against slavery, his aid to escaping slaves, and not least of all in the eyes of his fellow Iowans, the hospitality which he gave to John Brown on that radical abolitionist's trek through Iowa in 1859.

In that year, Iowa was a divided state. Although legally a free-soil state nearly all its public officials were pro-slavery Democrats, most of them appointed by President James Buchanan. Those men reported violations of the Fugitive Slave Law searched railroad cars for escaping slaves, and harassed settlers moving west on the Iowa trail to Kansas and Nebraska. Slaves were even owned and worked in the southern counties. At the beginning of the Civil War, Governor Samuel Kirkwood confessed in a letter to the secretary of the treasury. "The southern half of our state is strongly pro slavery.

Despite the Fugitive Slave Law which made it illegal to aid escaping slaves, southern slave owners protested that "Negroes escaped to Canada as easily as if they traveled on a railway which ran beneath the ground.

"A hamlet on the prairie as J. B. Grinnell described the town he founded, Grinnell was a stop on that 'Underground Railroad.'

### Entered Near Tabor

Slaves escaping from Missouri entered Iowa in the southwest corner of the state near Tabor and passed through Lewis, Des Moines, Grinnell, Iowa City, West Liberty, Tipton, DeWitt, and Low Moor, crossing the Mississippi at Clinton on their way to one of the Great Lakes

ports where they were ferried to Canada and freedom.

All along the "railroad," Iowans with strong abolitionist beliefs, usually New Englanders, helped the fleeing slaves by hiding them in houses, attics, and barns and passing the fugitives on under cover of night to the next station on the route. But those men were outnumbered simply because only one New Englander had settled in Iowa for every six southerners before 1850. Even some Iowans of New England background felt they had no right to break the law by helping escaping slaves.

Only a few towns like Tabor, Springdale, and Grinnell were overwhelmingly abolitionist. The Quakers of Springdale and the Congregationalists of Grinnell took seriously the Mosaic law which commanded, "Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee; he shall dwell with thee, even among you, in that place which he shall choose.

Josiah Bushnell Grinnell was particularly suited to follow that teaching. Born on December 22, 1821, in New Haven, Vt. To Myron and Catherine Hastings Grinnell, J.B. Grinnell was raised in an atmosphere of "hard work, poverty and a sternly religious training," according to his biographer, Charles Payne.

### Radical School

When Grinnell left the farm to get an education, he attended Oneida Institute "a hotbed of the radicalism of the day." Indeed, the school was so radical that the regents of the state of New York refused to let it confer degrees, and Grinnell completed the course of instruction without one.

In 1851, after graduating from the Theological Seminary in Auburn, NY, Grinnell went to Washington, D.C. as pastor of the Trinity Church. Grinnell was said to have preached the first anti slavery sermon heard in Washington at the First Congregational Church. Indeed his "forthright" preaching against slavery aroused such opposition that he was forced to leave the town. He returned to New York, where he married Julia A. Chapin, the daughter of an abolitionist minister on February 2, 1852.

Grinnell continued preaching. When his voice failed him as a result of too much outdoor speaking, he consulted Horace Greeley who

gave him the famous advice, "Go West, young man, go West. There is health in the country and room away from our crowds of idlers and imbeciles."

Grinnell took Greeley's advice and began his work of founding "somewhere in this new western country a religious, moral and educational community."

The new town of Grinnell embodied its founder's interest in abolition, and while J.B. Grinnell frequently condemned the lawlessness of Iowa, he was a conscientious breaker of the Fugitive Slave Law.

Grinnell, a wool trader, used his huge wool barn as a station. He and his fellow sheep raisers and station managers corresponded through cipher messages in which "fleeces of wool" referred to the fleeing slaves they were transporting.

#### 'Notorious Rendezvous'

So well known became the town's and Grinnell's activities that a reward was offered by Missouri slave owners for J.B. Grinnell "dead or alive." A letter in the Des Moines Journal charged that the town had gained a "widespread reputation of being the most notorious rendezvous for stolen and fugitive Negroes west of the Mississippi." The same letter claimed that \$37,000 worth of stolen "property" from Missouri had passed through J.B. Grinnell's hands.

In self-defense, Grinnell always claimed that he was "no party to enticing slaves away, only charged with the crime of giving shelter to the fleeing and helping them to Canada.

J.B. Grinnell's actions, however if legal, were mildly contrasted with the violence practiced by John Brown, just as Iowa was peaceful and united compared with the torments of "Bleeding Kansas." Yet when Brown appeared unexpectedly on J.B. Grinnell's doorstep in the late winter of 1859, there was no question but that the Kansan was welcome.

On Saturday, Feb. 20, 1859, J.B. Grinnell was reading the New York Tribune. The story he read was about John Brown. On the night of Dec. 19, 1858, Brown and a band of men had encamped on the Kansas side of the Missouri line. Their scout brought in a black, Jim Daniels, who appeared to be selling brooms. Daniels confided to Brown that he, his wife, and children belonged to a Missouri slave owner and were about to be sold at auction. Daniels was looking for help for himself and others he knew of in a similar plight.

On the following night, Brown and some of his men arrived at midnight at the house of

Daniels' owner, Harvey Hicklan. Hicklan was held at gunpoint while the band looted the house and out buildings for provisions and freed five slaves. Brown and his men went to another home and liberated another five slaves.

#### Slave owner Shot

Meanwhile, another party of Brown's men had gone to the home of a slave owner named David Cruise. Cruise, when he appeared to be reaching for a weapon, was shot and killed by one of Brown's men.

The slaying of Cruise, more than the theft of the slaves, aroused the countryside against Brown. The governor of Missouri offered a \$3,000 reward for Brown, and President Buchanan offered \$250.

The story of Cruise's murder and descriptions of the slaves spread over Iowa. Even anti-slavery communities such as Tabor were shocked by the killing of Cruise and gave Brown an unusually cool reception.

Brown was warned as he passed through Iowa that pro-slavery agents would be waiting in Grinnell. Those agents would be working for Samuel Workman, a Democrat, that Buchanan appointed postmaster at Iowa City and U.S. marshal for the district.

Shortly before noon on Feb. 20, Brown's party came in sight of Grinnell. Brown, unsure of what pro-slavery forces were nearby, left his band in a grove near the town and went to the home of J.B. Grinnell.

Brown rang the doorbell and introduced himself to Grinnell, not by name, but only as a friend of Mrs. Grinnell's father. Grinnell promptly invited the unexpected guest to tea.

After a short talk, Brown suddenly admitted, "I am not here on a social visit. I am the awful Brown—Capt. John Brown of Kansas.

Grinnell showed Brown the copy of the New York Tribune that he had just been reading and warned the Kansan that the authorities were after him.

#### Came for Advice

"My company is just back here in the grove, and I am only a scout," Brown replied. "Don't put yourself and family in jeopardy. I came for advice. I was in the wool business and am still, they say derisively and I hear you are openly. We are 16 persons, with horses and man and beast must be fed and stop with friends if we can and not spies. Then, it is Saturday and we want rest. I make it a rule not to travel on Sunday if it can be avoided and to save expenses we can cook our own food, and we

need a rendezvous to stack our arms. What do you advise?"

Grinnell opened the door to his parlor and said, "This is at your service, and you can occupy the stalls in the barn that are vacant.

Grinnell also advised Brown that there was no need to wait to bring the party into town, "for you have too much of an outfit for concealment."

By that time, as a Grinnell woman recalled, "a rumor ran through the settlement that John Brown, better known throughout the West as Ossawatimé Brown, had arrived in Grinnell with a small band of fugitives from Missouri on his way to Canada.

When Brown's company filed into Grinnell, the town was out in good numbers to see the outfit.

To J.B. Grinnell's eyes, Brown ... were particularly martial. "Co ... making as good a display as po... were glistening with spurs, and ... was a clink of swords and in si... Sharp's six-shooters ... Th... canvas-covered wagons followed... horsemen ... Sentinels were ... by strict military precaution, ... wrote later.

#### Pistol Not Concealed

Compared to his men, Brown ... dressed inconspicuously, in Gri... opinion. "There were no spurs ... boots, and he was only clad in ... well-worn suit, with nothing to ... border warfare save a wide-ri... and half-concealed pistol." Bro... the pistol openly to avoid break... law against carrying concealed ... weapons.

The party settled into the town ... black men were hidden in the ... Grinnell's wool barn and the women in the back room of Reid's Hotel... Grinnell's parlor became a m... arsenal by the stacking of rifle ... shotguns, carbines, revolvers, ... flasks, strings of bullets and s... and in the center of the room xxx spread blankets for sentinels, ... caution, were to take a bed wh... could spring to their weapons ... first alarm.

One townsman objected that ... town will be burned—it had b... threatened, and every man sh... home to defend his property S... about and the United States m... could easily make an arrest.

This "nervous, good man," ... Grinnell described him, expres... worries of many of the townspeople assembled that evening in the ... dience room used as the church... Brown spoke in defending his ... the Kansas border war.

"Bleeding Kansas" was of some concern to Grinnell citizens because many of them had friends or relatives settled there. But Brown's auc... made up of men to whom the ... raid, the murder of Cruise, an... theft of slaves were

almost as unforgivable crimes as slavery ... men wanted J.B. Grinnell to b... and not to bring reprisals from ... slavery factions onto the town.

#### Brown's Defense

Brown defended the violence ... sas by telling the Grinnellians ... to Kansas for peaceful settle... to save a great state from sla... Those that went there to forge... became murderers and desert... I am not a man of blood, but ... sends me on an errand I don't ... by enemies to choose the bat... ground, and if I ordered men ... was because they had planned ... There is no law on the border ... will be—the hirelings, backed ... Buchanan, cannot face lead.

A collection was taken to ... fugitives, but when Brown an... that he would put up for sale ... the surplus horses, a Grinnell ... ed, "What title can you give?"

"The best," Brown answered ... affidavit that they were taken ... men from land they had clear... which is kept back.

Another man asked Brown if he thought it right to sell stolen horses.

How can a piece of Missouri property ... steal" Brown asked in return. They did not start the controversy that took only what was due ... made rode away for their liberty ... any man ... coward would do if given a chance. Tomorrow being Sunday read your Bibles about hiding the one cast out Monday buy seven horses with help on ... black children.

Again on Saturday night Brown spoke to the townspeople. Slavery is a crime a... of his race and ... will put .....

Workman wrote. "Get the old devil away to save trouble, for he will be taken dead or alive.

#### Valuable Friendship

Not only did J.B. Grinnell realize the danger, but Workman was a personal friend and a promoter for the Rock Island Railroad, soon to enter the town, so the Democrat's continued friendship was valuable. Nevertheless, Grinnell gave the message to Brown.

Brown's reply was to tell Grinnell: "Give my compliments to the slave catcher with a notice that I shall wait here only one day to give him a reception, then pass directly east. My mission is fearful, but we can fire 100 times without loading, and even the black women are a dead shot. Never fear, I have been a minuteman for years amidst the singing of bullets, and my company will never be taken.

Monday came and sickness, as well as Brown's stubbornness, kept the party from moving on. Although Brown stayed the extra day, there was no sale of horses and Workman

did not appear. J.B. Grinnell believed Workman became less brave the closer Brown got to Iowa City. Workman's timidity was not unusual for pro-slavery officials in anti-slavery states who hesitated to enforce the Fugitive Slave Law because of widespread resentment of it.

Brown found time during his visit to linger in Grinnell's wool-barn where the two spoke of both forms of the "wool-trade": the raising of sheep and the shepherding of fugitive slaves in Canada.

"I am under the law of fate which I cannot read," Brown told Grinnell. "I like a quiet home and children, but there is no rest for me . . . Yes, wife, boys and all are full of fear, but they don't know my mission—it is direct from God Almighty, and I am discharging it."

#### A Kind of Insanity

Grinnell later revealed in his autobiography that this statement "gave me the first indication of a kind of insanity," and he urged Brown to "take rest or your losses and severe sacrifice of your boys will drive you to madness."

"No," Brown answered. "The battle is raging, and I must fight, much as I like a home and [to] play with children."

Grinnell also recalled overhearing a conversation between Brown and one of his men in which Brown said, "The article must be drafted over," followed by a long reading and discussion. Grinnell was later convinced that a part of the Virginia constitution, Brown's plan for a new state in the territory he conquered in the Harper's Ferry attack, was written in the Grinnell home, although Grinnell himself claimed to be ignorant of the Harper's Ferry plot.

On Tuesday, Brown and his party headed east. The town turned out to see Brown off just as it had to welcome him. Grinnell described his last sight of Brown "starting with his company sitting beside a driver in the van, holding a mulatto child, raising his hat in the midst of the cheers of the crowd, with a God-bless you, joined in by the equestrian troupe, that led and flanked his revered charges, bound for Springdale in Cedar County."

Brown stayed in the Quaker community of Springdale. Meanwhile

#### An Offer Refused

When the train stopped in Davenport, U.S. Marshal Laurel Summers boarded it with a posse, but they did not examine the freight car or catch Brown.

An Underground Railroad agent in Davenport, anxiously watching the train, reported, "From a window of the old Burtis Hotel,

I was greatly relieved to hear the train crossing the bridge to Chicago, where the Negroes landed safely next morning.

From Chicago, detective Allen Pinkerton arranged the blacks' transportation to Detroit where Brown saw the former slaves turned over to the Canadian authorities.

Brown was to remember his stay in Grinnell with gratitude. He wrote to friends in Tabor that his visit to Grinnell included the whole party and teams kept two days without cost and given food, clothing, lodging, and donations up to \$26.50.

Within months of his stay in Grinnell, Brown carried out his attack on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry. Brown, failing to arouse the support he expected would make his effort a success, was captured, tried, and then convicted of murder, slave insurrection, and treason against the state. The radical abolitionist was executed on Dec. 2, 1859.

Iowa saw a John Brown as a noble and in many town the flags flew at half mast. In Grinnell, Brown's death had immediate repercussions.

When captured, Brown had had personal letters from many abolitionists including a memorandum and letters written to Grinnell by Brown. Senator James M. Mason of Virginia, the author of the Fugitive Slave Law had been named head of a commission to investigate Brown's papers. Mason was convinced there was a widespread political conspiracy to free the slaves.

J.B. Grinnell was summoned by the Mason senatorial committee, and a writ of extradition was issued and made ready to give to Iowa Governor Kirkwood. Senator James W. Grimes of Iowa warned Grinnell in time to cross the border to Canada until things quieted. Friends advised Grinnell to flee to Canada or go into hiding instead. Grinnell went to Washington, bypassing the marshal with the extradition papers in Pittsburgh.

In Washington the issue was delayed until Senator Grimes threatened to bring the matter before the entire Senate. Grinnell was not given a hearing. Mason retorted that Grinnell was a willing witness and could go home but since he had not been escorted to the marshal, there were no fees due him and he had to pay his own fare home.

Grinnell never regretted his association with Brown, whom he described as a "martyr-hero" and "one who lived to elevate the race and dared to die for an idea."

The anti-abolitionist press also remembered Brown and his fateful visit to Iowa, and they labeled Grinnell, "John Brown Grinnell." The Ottumwa Mercury of Aug. 16, 1862, urged its readers to remember that John Brown "died a traitor to his country" and that J.B. Grinnell had been an adviser of Brown's.

The town of Grinnell also never forgot the abolitionist from Kansas. Stories of real

underground tunnels which were used to smuggle slaves persisted, despite consistent denials of their truth. The room in J.B. Grinnell's home where Brown slept became known as the "John Brown Room" and the parlor where Brown's men slept and stacked their arms was called the "Liberty Room." An old college joke claimed that J.B. Grinnell "invented the Republican party and discovered John Brown."

Recollections of Grinnell, By Thomas Brande (Also in my file "Old Homes of Grinnell")

At this time Grinnell was well known as an anti-slavery colony, and the Sabbath evening before my departure, a slave and his wife who had escaped from Topeka, Kansas, were present and desired help to escape to Canada. A fine young couple they seemed, of more than ordinary intelligence, 20 and 22 years of age, he having been a body servant to a lawyer in Topeka and she a house servant in a first-class family. I married a couple that evening in the school-house, Moses Abbot to Maria Longworthy, now Mrs. Pexton, after which Mr. Grinnell introduced the fugitives and read the slave act with its severe penalties, which made us all liable as criminals in aiding slaves to escape from their masters. The next morning I found them in the wagon which was to take me to Iowa city and bring thence a load of lumber for my brother. Professor Parker went on ahead on business of his own, but sent us word where to take the fugitives on our arrival.

The next morning they were on the cars headed for Chicago, fearing greatly that they would be arrested and taken back into slavery. On nearing the city the woman said to me, "Let my husband be your body servant and carry your baggage and I will put on my veil and gloves and follow you at a distance and no one will know me from a white woman." We did so, and escaped detection. I soon found them friends in Chicago who assured them that they were as safe in Chicago with proper precaution as they would be in Canada. That is the last I saw or heard of them, and that is all the part I had in conjunction with Grinnellites in the underground railroad, in seeking to abolish the sum of all villainies.

[Tuesday, September 10, 1893 *Grinnell Herald*]

Found in some college history notes written in 1991:

J. B. Grinnell was a Congregational minister, farmer, and businessman who in 1857 chaired the legislative committee that planned Iowa's system of public education. A vigorous opponent of slavery, he welcomed the fiery abolitionist John Brown to his town in 1859 after Brown's bloody raids in Kansas and Missouri. Grinnell made his community a stop on the Underground Railroad, and some 1,000 slaves passed through the town in the years before the Civil War. The city's founder was also a Congressman who strongly supported the policies of President Abraham Lincoln.

Notes from a collection for a talk I gave on Poweshiek County Participation in November 1999  
Also in file: "Civil War Notes"

## UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Town of Grinnell and its leaders became deeply interested in national politics. *Montezuma Weekly Republican* kept its readers well informed. Another widely read newspaper was the weekly edition of Horace Greeley's *Tribune*, a political bible and had quite the influence in Grinnell as J. B.

Grinnell was an occasional correspondent. The press those days was strictly along party lines—men read their own party papers and no others. The battle raging in Kansas in the 1850s whether it would be "free soil" or become a slave state was of much interest here. Professor Parker had recently come from Kansas and many had friends and relatives there. Around 1860 the abolitionists had established an Underground Railroad from Kansas and Missouri to Canada and Mr. Grinnell's huge wool barn became one of its stations. Great was the excitement among his workmen whenever word came for "one of the boys" to hurry fugitives on to the next station 35 miles away. The trip was usually made by wagon at night, the driver sometimes having at his side a "double-faced bulldog" that kept curious persons from investigating the quality of the freight. While condemning the prevalent lawlessness in Iowa, Mr. Grinnell became a conscientious lawbreaker himself. He frequently spoke denouncing slavery but had a strong faith in America and had a vision of a continent linked together by a vast system of railroads and was determined to maintain the Union at all costs—without slavery. (*Josiah B. Grinnell*)

**John Brown**, native of Connecticut, businessman in Ohio and New York, went to Kansas to make a home for freemen of whatever color. Anti-slavery people trusted and aided Brown. When in Grinnell he did not try to hide himself even though a US marshal had sent word that he'd be arrested immediately. His answer was "I will wait here 1 day longer for his accommodation. We can shoot 60 times in as many seconds." The marshal did not appear. (1911 Poweshiek County History, p. 222)

Grinnell gave a warm reception to John Brown and his band in their flight from Kansas in February 1859. John Brown was a religious fanatic who killed people in the process. He left Kansas determined to strike in the East, got arms and ammunition that had been stockpiled for him at Tabor, invaded Missouri with two bands of raiders, killed slave owner, stole horses, and captured some slaves. He began his journey across Iowa armed with swords, six shooters and Sharp's rifles. Despite a large reward for their capture they traveled in the open boldly entering Des Moines and visited a newspaper editor, then reached Grinnell on the 25th with Brown going directly to JB Grinnell's home even though they'd never met. JB had just been reading about John Brown in the newspaper and of the reward for his capture and even showed the article to Brown. Brown promised not to jeopardize the Grinnell family but needed advice and rest for his

party. JB offered the use of his large wool barn. That night Brown spoke at the church and defended his seizure of slaves in MO on the ground they were about to be sold in the far south and his strategy was to keep slave holders away from Kansas. His answer to stealing horses was to give the Negroes what had been "kept back by fraud." Returning from church that evening, Grinnell found a note from a marshal in Iowa City urging him to get Brown away. Brown was not afraid and even stayed in Grinnell an extra day "taunting" the military squad but they didn't come so he loaded the women, clothing and baggage and went on to a Quaker settlement at Springdale where he remained till March 10th. In the meantime JB went to Chicago and as a wool-shipper arranged for a stock car to be dropped off at West Liberty. Iowa City abolitionists got the slaves aboard and were taken to Chicago where the well-known detective Allan Pinkerton got them on to Detroit and across the border.

Brown felt he had a good reception in Grinnell and told of the free lodging, clothing, food, contributions of \$26.50 and the prayers and full endorsement from many attending the church meetings including 3 Congregational ministers. This was to haunt Grinnell later when the Democratic press denounced Brown as "John Brown Grinnell" and that he died as a traitor to his country but JB Grinnell had been an admirer.

The present Robert Phillips home south of Searsboro being used as a stop on the **underground railroad**. (The Searsboro Centennial book)

Around 1860 the abolitionists had established an Underground Railroad from Kansas and Missouri to Canada and Mr. Grinnell's huge wool barn became one of its stations. Great was the excitement among his workmen whenever word came for "one of the boys" to hurry fugitives on to the next station 35 miles away. The trip was usually made by wagon at night, the driver sometimes having at his side a "double-faced bulldog" that kept curious persons from investigating the quality of the freight. While condemning the prevalent lawlessness in Iowa, Mr. Grinnell became a conscientious lawbreaker himself. He frequently spoke denouncing slavery but had a strong faith in America and had a vision of a continent linked together by a vast system of railroads and was determined to maintain the Union at all costs—without slavery. (*Josiah B. Grinnell*)

John Brown, native of Connecticut, businessman in Ohio and New York, went to Kansas to make a home for freemen of whatever color. Anti-slavery people trusted and aided Brown. When in Grinnell he did not try to hide himself even though a US marshal had sent word that he'd be arrested immediately. His answer was "I will wait here 1 day longer for his accommodation. We can shoot 60 times in as many seconds." The marshal did not appear. (1911 Poweshiek County History, p. 222)

Grinnell gave a warm reception to John Brown and his band in their flight from Kansas in February 1859. John Brown was a religious fanatic who killed people in the process. He left Kansas determined to strike in the East, got arms and ammunition that had been stockpiled for him at Tabor, invaded Missouri with two bands of raiders, killed slave owner, stole horses, and captured some slaves. He began his journey across Iowa armed with swords, six shooters and Sharp's rifles. Despite a large reward for their capture they traveled in the open boldly entering Des Moines and visited a newspaper editor, then reached Grinnell on the 25th with Brown going directly to JB Grinnell's home even though they'd never met. JB had just been reading about John Brown in the newspaper and of the reward for his capture and even showed the article to Brown. Brown promised not to jeopardize the Grinnell family but needed advice and rest for his party. JB offered the use of his large wool barn. That night Brown spoke at the church and defended his seizure of slaves in MO on the ground they were about to be sold in the far south and his strategy was to keep slave holders away from Kansas. His answer to stealing horses was to give the Negroes what had been "kept back by fraud." Returning from church that evening, Grinnell found a note from a marshal in Iowa City urging him to get Brown away. Brown was not afraid and even stayed in Grinnell an extra day "taunting" the military squad but they didn't come so he loaded the women, clothing and baggage and went on to a Quaker settlement at Springdale where he remained till March 10th. In the meantime JB went to Chicago and as a wool-shipper arranged for a stock car to be dropped off at West Liberty. Iowa City abolitionists got the slaves aboard and were taken to Chicago where the well-known detective Allan Pinkerton got them on to Detroit and across the border. Brown was deeply moved by the Grinnell reception and the day after his arrival at Springdale he sent the following to friends in Tabor:

- 1st Whole party & teams kept for two days free of cost
- 2d Sundry articles of clothing given to captives
- 3d Bread, meat, cakes, pies, etc. prepared for our journey
- 4th Full houses for two nights in succession at which meetings Brown and Kagi spoke and were loudly cheered; and fully endorsed. Three Congregational clergymen attended the meeting on Sabbath evening (notice of which was given out from the Pulpit). All of them took part in justifying our course & in urging contributions in our behalf and there was no dissenting speaker present at either meeting. Mr. Grinnell spoke at length & has since labored to procure us a free and safe conveyance to Chicago & effected it.
- 5th Contributions in cash amounting to \$26.50.
- 6th Last but not least public thanksgiving to all-mighty God offered up by Mr. Grinnell on the behalf of the whole company for his great mercy; & protecting care, with prayers for a continuance of those blessings.

Respectfully your friend,

John Brown

PS. Our reception among the Quaker friends here has been most cordial. Yours truly,  
JB. (Josiah B. Grinnell)

Note: This quoted letter was included in a Grinnell Herald Register article on John Brown of November 21, 1983, p. 10.



Grinnell's treatment of Brown caused quite a stir in the town and anti-abolitionist circles in the state. For years the Democratic press denounced Brown as "John Brown Grinnell." They also kept reminding people that John Brown had died a traitor to his country and that JB Grinnell was an admirer. (*Josiah B. Grinnell*)

The present Robert Phillips home south of Searsboro being used as a stop on the underground railroad. (The Searsboro Centennial book)

### Was the Underground really underground?

Grinnell was well-known during the Civil War era as a station on the Underground Railroad. J.B. Grinnell, one of the foremost abolitionists in Iowa, used his wool-barn to hide fleeing slaves, but over the years stories grew of a tunnel near the Grinnell home and a system of tunnels in the city.

J. B. Grinnell admitted, "It is only the truth that Grinnell had been a station on the underground railway, but the departures had been in the night and the adventures not generally known. Certainly the event had found no local publicity, attended with cost if not personal peril." Grinnell never mentioned the existence of any tunnels.

J. B. Grinnell's daughter denied there was a tunnel. H. L. Triplett, a friend of J.B. Grinnell and later owner of the house, claimed that "J.B. Grinnell helped slaves to escape, but it was at night by lending them horses and shipping them in box cars.

Another famous legendary tunnel supposedly originated near the now-razed Monroe Hotel and ran south to the old Almy house in East St. One man claimed to have traveled 75 to 100 feet in the Almy House tunnel. Mrs. Almy was supposed to have said that the tunnel was only a cave which her sons used for growing chameleons. In another story, a Grinnell woman remembered playing in the "cave" as a girl and said it was really a cyclone cellar.

Although the Almy House was burned down some years ago for firemen's practice, Grant Gale, a frequent visitor to the Almy house, does not recall ever seeing a tunnel, and he doubts that the stories are true.

There was also a story that the "Spaulding tunnel" used by the company for power transmission might have originated as part of the Underground Railroad.

There are tunnels in the city which were used when city businessmen bought their heat from a central heating plant which piped steam underneath the city. Those tunnels are in no way connected with the Underground Railroad.

Rose Stoops of the Grinnell Historical Museum sums up the stories well when she says, "I really don't know of any authentic tunnels that were used for the Underground Railroad."

History of Hazelwood and my talk to 9<sup>th</sup> graders 10-13-99

**First, lets go back to the very beginning.** J. B. Grinnell in his book "Men and Events of Forty Years" states: "We had many discussions as to the place for our dead. Property owners did not want a location near them. Some wanted a grove three miles away; others a spot quite near the highway. I favored the place now occupied— covered with a clump of hazel, off from the highway, abruptly rolling and overlooking our projected city. Of course, I had the opportunity of donating the land, which I did—some 13 acres without condition or reserve." Later Mr. Grinnell asked that no section be set apart as a reminder of Negro slavery nor a pauper's neglected corner; the rich and poor should be together.

**J. B. Grinnell** (p. 24)—one of three original founders, legislator, minister, and stopping point on the underground railroad. (Sec. III)

## Underground Railroad Connections file from internet:

Appanoose

Adamson, H.  
 Armstrong.  
 Calvert.  
 Fulcher, John.  
 Gilbert, Josiah.  
 Green, Jacob.  
 Hedgecock, Wm.  
 Hollbrook, Luther R.  
 McDonald, D.  
 Martin, Wesley.  
 Robinson, Moses.  
 Root, George.  
 Stanton, Nathan.  
 Stanton, Seth B.  
 Tulcher, John.

Cass

Coe, J. N.  
 Grindley, Amos.  
 Hitchcock, Rev. George B.  
 Mills, Hon. Oliver.

Cedar

Maxon, Wm.

Clinton

Bather, Andrew.  
 Bather, J. R.  
 Brindell, G. W.  
 Burdette, Capt.  
 Campbell, C. B.  
 Gleason, Abel B.  
 Graham, Judge.  
 Jones, J. B.  
 Leslie, H.  
 Mix, Lawrence.  
 Olin, Nelson.  
 Palmer, B. R.  
 Savage, T.  
 Star, W. B.  
 Stillman, Mrs. J. D.  
 Weston, George W.

Davis

Corner, Albert.  
 Corner, Arthur.  
 Conner, W. E.  
 Elliott, George.  
 Elliott, John.  
 Hardy, David.

Hardy, James.  
 Klingler, Wm.  
 Paggett, Hiram.  
 Stanton, Seth B.  
 Truit, Adbell

Fremont

Adams, S. H.  
 Avery, E.  
 Blanchard, Dr. Ira D.  
 Bottsford, Rev.  
 Brooks, Wm. M.  
 Case, Cephas.  
 Clark, Wm. L.  
 Cummings, Origin.  
 Dea, S. D.  
 Gaston, A. C.  
 Gaston, George B.  
 Gaston, James K.  
 Hallam, John.  
 Horton, H. B.  
 Hill, Rev. E. S.  
 Hill, L. B.  
 Hunter, George.  
 Irish, Henry.  
 Jones, Jonas.  
 Lambert, Mrs. Lydia Blanchard.  
 Lane, William.  
 Lawrence, Charles F.  
 Mason.  
 Platt, Mrs. E. G.  
 Platt, Lester.  
 Platt, Rev. M. F.  
 Sheldon, Hon. E. T.  
 Shepardson, Mrs. S. R.  
 Smith, James L.  
 Todd, Rev. John.  
 Williams, Reuben.  
 Williams, Hon. Sturgis.  
 Woods, D.  
 West, Jesse.

Henry

Armstrong, J. H. B.  
 Corey, Benj.  
 Edwards, James.  
 Holbrake, L.  
 Howe, Prof. S. L.  
 Pickering, John H.

Johnson

Clark, Wm. Penn.  
Keokuk  
 Durfee family.

Lee

Adamson, Brown.

Madison

Roberts, Hon. B. F.  
 Scott, Dr. John.

Mahaska

Hockett, Isaac.  
 McCormick, Mathew.  
 Montgomery, Wm.

Mills

Bradburgh.  
 Bradshaw.  
 Briggs, Daniel.  
 Morse.  
 Tolles, C. W.  
 Wing.  
 Woodford, Newton.

Pottawattamie

Bradway, Calvin.

Poweshiek

Bailey, John F.  
 Bixby, Amos.  
 Bliss, Harvey.  
 Brande, Elder T.  
 Cooper, Col. S.F.  
 Grinnell, Hon. J.B.  
 Hamlin, Homer.  
 Harris family.  
 Parker, Prof. L.F.  
 Parks, Philo.

Wapello

English.  
 Wilson.

Washington

Rankin, Samuel.

Taking the names of Poweshiek County, this is residence information:

Poweshiek

Bailey, John F.	Possibly 4 <sup>th</sup> and Main; Moved in 1864 to 11 <sup>th</sup> and West
Bixby, Amos.	1003 1 <sup>st</sup> Avenue
Bliss, Harvey.	John Brown visited his store in "Roll Call of Houses" story (Broad bet 1 <sup>st</sup> & 2 <sup>nd</sup> )
Brande, Elder T.	Wisconsin 1860-1868. 4 <sup>th</sup> and Park in 1874
Cooper, Col. S.F.	436 East Street, State Board of Education 1858, Lt. Col in 4 <sup>th</sup> Iowa Cavalry, Clerk of Court in Arkansas
Grinnell, Hon. J.B.	3 <sup>rd</sup> and Park, 1878
Hamlin, Homer.	6 <sup>th</sup> & West
Harris family.	Both were physicians, 5 <sup>th</sup> and Broad in 1878 5 <sup>th</sup> & West 1855
Parker, Prof. L.F.	
Parks, Philo.	

I have copies of early City Directories of 1878, 1894-5, 1900, 1905, 1908, 1910, 1920 and 1940. (I know there was one in the 60s that I do not have.) My next ones start at 1970, 1973, 1976, and continue on.





