

Ohio History Connection

Site Brochure: Rankin House

29 August 2015

PANEL 1 (COVER)

Features the site's hero image.

[image + caption]

Gateway on the journey to freedom

The home of Rev. John Rankin was one of the best-known "stations" along the Underground Railroad.

[Ohio History Connection logo]

PANEL 2 (INSIDE LEFT)

Welcome to Ripley's Rankin House

Relive one of the most moving episodes in our country's history: people risking their lives and fortunes to help others.

A Commitment to Freedom for All

On New Year's Day of 1822, a Presbyterian minister and native Tennessean named John Rankin moved his family to the free state of Ohio, settling in the town of Ripley. Having seen firsthand the evils of slavery, he dedicated his life's work and ministry to freeing African Americans from bondage.

From both his writings and his activism, Rankin became a renowned leader within the Abolitionist movement. Much of his work occurred here, at his Ripley home.

[image + caption]

PANEL 3 (INSIDE CENTER)

Lighthouse on the Ohio

“A lighted candle stood as a beacon which could be seen from across the river, and like the North Star was the guide to the fleeing slave.” Thus wrote Ripley businessman John Parker, a friend of the Rankins and former slave himself, who collaborated with them as an abolitionist and slave rescuer.

From this house, perched high on a bluff overlooking the Ohio River, Rankin would signal fugitive slaves in Kentucky, letting them know when it was safe for them to cross into Ohio. Once here, the escapees would be welcomed and given sanctuary until it was safe for them to move on.

Spreading the Word

As a Christian minister, John Rankin knew slavery was wrong, and freedom was every person’s right. He was convinced that slaves and masters were equal before God. When his own brother became a slaveholder in Virginia, Rankin responded with a series of letters—the *Letters on American Slavery*—addressed to his brother but also published in 1826 for the benefit of the public. As a result, Rankin’s brother Thomas moved to Ohio, freed his slaves and became an abolitionist.

A Family Affair

Rev. Rankin and his wife Jean had thirteen children, and the entire family participated in the fight against slavery. Rankin himself spoke across the country and began local anti-slavery organizations throughout the region. Mrs. Rankin sewed clothes and prepared meals for fugitives visiting their home. The Rankin boys often carried escaped slaves on horseback to their next Underground Railroad shelters in the communities north of Ripley. Many of their neighbors also bravely assisted.

In all, the Rankins reportedly helped more than 2,000 runaway slaves escape to freedom, and they were justly proud of never having lost a “passenger.” Later, six of Rankin’s sons and one grandson fought in the Civil War to end slavery for good. All of them survived.

PANEL 4 (INSIDE RIGHT)

House on the Hill

Three years after their arrival in Ripley, the Rankins built their house in 1825. The house, together with the hill on which it sits, soon acquired the nickname “Liberty Hill” for the deeds the Rankins accomplished there. The house is approached by a long stairway leading up the hill from the town of Ripley below. Once rafted across the river by their Underground Railroad escorts, fugitive slaves would climb these steps to safety and hospitality at the Rankin home.

The house was acquired by the State of Ohio in 1938 and opened to the public in 1948. In 1997 the John Rankin House was named a National Historic Landmark, the highest federal designation awarded to an historic property. The house underwent a complete restoration in 2014.

Today

A simple brick structure with a wooden porch, the house commands one of the most beautiful views anywhere on the Ohio River. On a clear day, you can see seven bends of the river from here. Inside, the home contains much of the original woodwork and several of the Rankins’ personal belongings, including the family Bible.

You can hear firsthand anti-slavery accounts from the docents, and stories of the courageous choices made by Ripley residents who helped the Rankins in their work. You’ll also learn about Ohio’s role in the wider Abolitionist movement that helped bring about the end of slavery.

[image + caption]

PANEL 5 (FOLDOVER FLAP)

This panel takes a step back from the historical narrative and speaks directly to the audience, building excitement about the site in shorter bursts. Graphic style should change to differentiate it from inside panels. Tone can be more conversational and down-to earth. The section headers below can be consistent across brochures or change to support the text that follows.

Did You Know?

Leading abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison considered himself a Rankin disciple, citing *Letters on American Slavery* as “the cause of my entering the anti-slavery conflict.”

Harriet Beecher Stowe immortalized Rankin’s efforts in her novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. One of the book’s main characters is Eliza, a young slave woman who had escaped across the frozen Ohio River with her child in her arms, and stayed with the Rankins on her way north.

Rankin also founded a Presbyterian academy in Ripley for boys, which in 1838 the young Ulysses S. Grant attended.

Don’t miss...

- The Rankin House is one of the best-documented and most active **Underground Railroad** “stations” in Ohio. Learn about Rankin’s role as a “conductor.”
- Following in the footsteps of fugitive slaves, you can still climb the long **stairway** leading up the hill to the house. For a less strenuous approach, the house is also accessible by car, up Rankin Hill Road from **The Ripley Museum**.
- See the historic town of **Ripley** itself, which is part of the **Ohio River Scenic Byway**. Ripley’s 55-acre **historic district** is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Take a stroll around **Front Street** and savor the sights and sounds of river life. View the beautiful and historic **riverside houses**, or enjoy one of the great local **restaurants**.
- John Rankin wasn’t the only famous abolitionist in Ripley. You can also visit the **John P. Parker House**, home of the African American inventor, entrepreneur and another successful “conductor” on the Underground Railroad.

CTA

Learn more at the ‘Museums and Historic Sites’ page at OhioHistory.org

[image + caption]

PANEL 6 (BACK COVER)

Location:

Physical Address

Phone Number

See XX website for directions.

Hours:

Seasons

Days and Hours

Admission:

Price info

Tours:

Types, scheduling phone number, pertinent details.