



## *News from the Ohio Turnpike*

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**For Immediate Release:**

### **Governor DeWine unveils Underground Railroad Historical Marker**

*The Governor notes Ohio's prominence in the Underground Railroad as part of Black History Month*

**MANTUA, OH (Feb. 12)** – Governor Mike DeWine joined leaders from the Ohio Turnpike, the Friends of Freedom Society, Ohio Department of Transportation and the Ohio History Connection to dedicate and unveil an Underground Railroad Historical Marker this afternoon at the Portage Service Plaza in Mantua, Ohio.

“For decades to come, these markers will remind travelers of Ohio’s significant role in supporting the Underground Railroad,” said Governor Mike DeWine. “It’s important we continue to share these stories of persistence and courage with future generations.”

The marker, one of four to be installed at four Ohio Turnpike Service Plazas, tells the story of the Underground Railroad on one side. On the other side are stories of local significance, such as the prominence of J. Ridgeway Haines, a prominent member of the Quaker community in Alliance.

As local lore has it, Haines stood guard at night when freedom seekers sheltered in an upper room in the rear of his house. Today, his house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

“There is enduring value in commemorating the pursuit of freedom through the stories of the passengers and conductors on the Underground Railroad,” said Executive Director Ferzan M. Ahmed, P.E. “Northern Ohio’s prominent role in the National Underground Railroad cannot be overstated,” he added.

The Underground Railroad in Ohio consisted of south-to-north escape routes that followed two major paths mainly from West Virginia and Kentucky across the Ohio River and to points north.

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## **Governor DeWine unveils Underground Railroad Historical Marker, continued**

Some of the major trails converged in eastern Ohio and still others found their way toward western Ohio. Today, these and other paths to freedom crossed the present-day Ohio Turnpike. Other trails even traveled along portions of the Ohio Turnpike where it exists today.

These historical markers are a great educational opportunity for turnpike travelers. In fact, Ohio Turnpike Service Plazas provide services to an estimated 22 million visitors annually.

At Portage Service Plaza alone, an estimated 3.1 million visitors will have an opportunity to learn about the Underground Railroad when they walk past the markers. Surely, they will pause to read and reflect on the meaning of the stories displayed for all to see.

The first set of Underground Railroad Markers were dedicated by the Friends of Freedom Society in 1999. “The history of the Underground Railroad and Ohio’s role in that endeavor remains a source of inspiration, reminding us who we were, who we are, and who we can be. It was the nation’s first Civil Rights Movement,” said Cathy Nelson, Founder & President Emeritus of the Friends of Freedom Society.

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