

ening to turn Charlotta and her children over to slave traders if she refused.

Gordon complied, and the party continued north through Missouri. They were stopped frequently, but allowed to proceed each time because of the presence of two white men and a white woman. By the time they reached the Des Moines River and crossed into Iowa at Keokuk, the weather had turned cold, so they decided to settle there. Harry Pyles, who was a carpenter and stone mason as well as a leather worker, built a small brick house for them all on Johnson Street. Their oldest son, Barney, who had done most of the driving on the trip from Kentucky, found work driving a freight wagon overland from Keokuk to Des Moines.

To ease the financial burden of supporting this large household, Charlotta resolved to obtain the freedom of her sons-in-law in Kentucky so they could come to Iowa and help. Word came from Kentucky that the cost would be \$1,500 each. To raise the needed funds, Charlotta went east and made antislavery speeches in Philadelphia. Here she met

prominent antislavery leaders, including Frederick Douglass. In six months she had raised the needed \$3,000 and returned to Iowa and then to Kentucky, where she bought Julia's and Emily's husbands from their owners.

According to Charlotta's granddaughter, in later years her home in Keokuk became an early stop on the underground railroad. "Many a slave, coming from Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri, found at the gateway into Iowa an enthusiastic member of their own race in the person of Grandma Pyles. She received them into her own home and ... helped them to make their escape to Canada."

Charlotta died in Keokuk in 1880 at the age of 74. Her story demonstrates that most of the initiative and the risk of escaping enslavement were borne by the freedom seekers themselves. They were not simply the passive, helpless recipients of the kindness of strangers. They took their fate in their own hands, and when successful often became "conductors" and "agents" themselves on the underground railroad. ❖

tually made their way to Newton, where they were sheltered for a time at the Wittenberg Manual Arts College north of town, founded by "free Presbyterians" from Ohio and a known stop on the underground railroad in Jasper County. The next day, John hired out to work for a man named Richard Scherer and took the name "John Scherer." Under this name he enlisted in the First Regiment, Iowa Colored Infantry,

known later as the 60th Regiment. U.S. Colored Troops.

When the war was over, John returned to Missouri and brought his parents, Paulice and Clarissa Miller, to live in Newton. Three sisters—Clem, Lettie, and Lizzie Miller—had already been brought there in 1862 by Aleck Nichols. From the war's end until his death, John Graves, alias John Scherer, was known as "John Ross Miller."

John's story reminds us that fugitive slaves were often aided by other African Americans, both free and slave. Only near the end of their ordeals were they assisted by the agents of the underground railroad. ❖

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