

## Halifax County, the Roanoke River and Freedom Seeking

### Overview

Halifax County, NC, is situated along the Roanoke River in northeastern North Carolina. Both the county, the town by the same name, and the river are rich with Black history, and played a vital role in the lives of free and enslaved Black people, as well as in the Maritime Underground Railroad in North Carolina. Halifax grew to have one of the largest free Black communities in North Carolina, had a large skilled class of enslaved and free artisans, and existed in close proximity to an active, abolitionist Quaker population. The combination of these communities, along with the geographical location of Halifax to the Roanoke River and connecting bodies of water, made the area a prime stop and destination for freedom seekers. Through reading, discussion, and the examination of runaway advertisements connected to Halifax, students will learn about the history of the area, with a focus on the skills, contributions, resistance, and resilience of enslaved and free people. Students will then assume the role of the director of Historic Halifax and tackle how to best represent this history through signage today.

### Grades

8 - 11

### Materials

- Halifax County, the Roanoke River and Freedom Seeking, handout attached
- Sample images (Halifax swamp lands and Roanoke River) attached
- Exploring Primary Sources-Runaway Ads, worksheet attached
- Laptops with access to [UNCG's NC Runaway Slave Advertisements database](#); this database is part of the [Digital Library on American Slavery](#), a recognized collection with the [National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom \(NTF\)](#). If technology is unavailable, teachers can also print out some of the Halifax County advertisements and provide to students. Sample ads to utilize include:
  - [Levi, 1797](#)
  - [Isaac, 1800](#)
  - [William, 1801](#)
  - [John, 1817](#)
  - [Rickey, 1827](#)
  - [William, 1832](#)
  - [Piety, 1808](#) and again in [1824](#)
- History & Memory: Elevating the Black History of Halifax, culminating assignment attached

### Additional Resources

- [National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom \(NTF\)](#): The mission of NTF is to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues

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to inspire people worldwide. Through its mission, the NTF helps to advance the idea that all human beings embrace the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression.

- NC African American Heritage Commission’s [Freedom Roads Trail](#): Freedom Roads is a statewide trail system that recognizes the places (from rivers to towns) that were crucial to the efforts of freedom seeking throughout the state, as well as the freedom seekers and their allies, whose stories testify to the indomitable spirit found in thousands who strove to be free and aided them in success.
  - *Freedom Roads sites include designations in the National Park Service’s [Network to Freedom Underground Railroad](#) program, as well as other sites and routes recognized by historians and/or archaeologists as significant to African American freedom seeking in North Carolina.*
- [Historic Halifax](#) (and the [African American Experience](#))
- [Halifax Underground Railroad](#)
- [The Roanoke Canal](#)
- [The Spirits of Freedom](#)

### Duration

- 60 minutes
- Additional time may be needed for the culminating project

### Preparation

Students must understand expectations for respectfully discussing “[hard history](#)” such as enslavement. While this history brings up difficult topics such as racism and racial violence, such history represents a part of our shared state and national history that students must understand in order to comprehend its impact on the present. To ensure students are able to respectfully and empathetically discuss such topics, teachers must ensure a foundation of civil discourse, respect and empathy in the classroom. For techniques on building such a classroom community, see Carolina K-12’s classroom management activities in the Database of K-12 Resources under the “[Activities](#)” section and specifically our [Tips for Tackling Sensitive History & Controversial Current Events in the Classroom](#).

### Procedure

#### Warm Up: Geographical Features of Halifax

1. As a warm up, provide students with the attached handout, Halifax County, the Roanoke River and Freedom Seeking. Ask students to take a few moments to consider and answer the warm up question at the top of the reading. (Teachers should project a map that shows the outline and location of Halifax County, as well as the location of the town of Halifax.) After a few minutes of individual consideration, ask students to share with the class the features they think made Halifax a destination point for enslaved people seeking freedom. (Answers should include the proximity to the Roanoke River, access to the coast, swampy areas for hiding, the proximity to the Virginia border for those wishing to go farther north, etc.)

#### Overview: Halifax County, the Roanoke River and Freedom Seeking

2. Let students know that they will be learning about the incredible history of this area, first through reading the handout provided, and answering the corresponding questions throughout. (Students can do this individually or in reading partners.) Teachers should hold a class discussion afterwards, in which the most important main ideas of the reading are reviewed, and students are able to share their thoughts to the questions, as well as ask for any clarifications needed. Questions to review:
  - What types of skills, knowledge, intelligences, experiences, etc. did enslaved and free Blacks have and contribute to Halifax and beyond? What impact did they make on the entire state?

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- In what ways did enslaved people, freedom seekers, and free Blacks use their knowledge and skills to resist the oppressive situations in which they were placed?
- Based on what you've learned thus far, as well as on the account of freedom seeker James Williams, what was the reality of running away like? What types of traits would a person need to be successful at gaining their freedom in this way?
- What were the various ways those enslaved sought and fought for their freedom?
- Who were the people responsible for aiding freedom seekers and helping to ensure their success?
- What made the Halifax area so compelling that its Black population grew to outnumber its white *population*
- In what ways does what you have read about differ from the classic image of enslaved people working in plantation fields? What are some of the ways that enslaved people, through their own agency and skills, managed to carve out spaces of independence?
- What do you think is most important to know about freedom seekers? Why is it important that we know about and understand this part of our history?
- How does this history impact our world today?

### **The Reality of Running Away**

3. Remind students that when studying slavery, it is a mistake to assume enslaved individuals were passive beings who simply accepted all that was dealt to them, from the harsh punishment to the cruel restrictions they experienced. In truth, those enslaved were truly resilient and exhibited incredible agency in the overt but also subtle ways they carved out areas of freedom in their lives, even in the midst of danger and oppression. This includes the risky choice of running away. Discuss with students:

- Why do you think some enslaved people chose to flee while others did not?
  - Explain that the reasons for running away were often complex. Some enslaved people understandably desired freedom no matter what the risk, many hoping to escape violent and cruel conditions. Many sought to reunite with family and loved ones, and in fact many advertisements will mention runaways heading further south and/or “lurking” around plantations for this reason. While students may assume enslaved people would head for the North to “freedom,” many were actually running deeper into the Confederacy out of love.
  - During Colonial times, some enslaved people found not only the institution of slavery unbearable, but also the cultural differences they faced in the places in which they were enslaved. For example, “...before the Revolution, Africans comprised perhaps half of the runaways. Shocked and bewildered by their enslavement, Africans defected at the earliest opportunity. They were the least acculturated slaves, still bearing the marks and scars of African rituals. Few could speak English.”
- What did enslaved people risk by running away?
  - Discuss with students how often, with our modern sensibilities guiding us, we assume that were we enslaved, we would most certainly run away – if not violently revolt. But many make this assumption without a true historical perspective or consideration of the realities and risks of running away. There were enslaved individuals with immense courage and fortitude who attempted to “steal their freedom,” freedom which of course should never have been denied them. Of these freedom seekers, some survived and were successful, while many others were brutally slain or re-enslaved. However, those who chose not to run away cannot be assumed to be any less courageous. Rather, they were weighing their options and making the best decision for their own individual, familial, and community circumstances and survival.

- Running away could result in capture, mutilation, torture, whipping, restraint/physical bondage, re-enslavement under harsher conditions, or death.
- “The war years brought more opportunities to men and women to run away successfully and they took advantage of them in order to make personal statements about the institution of slavery. While many ran off to join family members and friends in various cities, others ran to the British (during the Revolutionary War) and the Union (during the Civil War) lines in hopes that they would be set free. Some even ran off to form maroon communities where they could live freely among themselves. The decision to flee was not an easy one for most slaves. Often times slaves fleeing for their freedom were caught and either executed, forced to work hard labor or deported/sold off. Even those who were successful in escaping during wars were often forced to take shelter in refugee camps that were poorly equipped to handle so many people. Here women and children often met starvation, disease and death. Slaves who ran away also risked harming loved ones who stayed behind. Even when slaves were able to achieve their freedom there was a constant threat that they would be recaptured, their dreams of freedom ripped away, and returned to their masters or worse.” ([Source](#))

4. To deepen the conversation, project an image for students to get a visual sense of what those enslaved would be escaping into, such as images of swamp lands found in eastern NC or the Great Dismal Swamp spanning across the NC/VA border. Discuss:

- Consider the actual act of running away. What would be difficult regarding this decision?
  - Encourage students to consider the actuality of running away. Who might they be leaving behind? What might they be risking? If they succeeded in running away, where exactly would they go, how would they get there safely, and what would they do once there?
  - Ensure students consider that the landscape of North Carolina was completely different than what they know today. There were no paved road or street lights. Even if some type of path or road was available, an escapee typically had to stay off of it, instead making their way through untouched woods and underbrush in order to stay hidden. A freedom seeker would not have the modern luxury of a flashlight to provide visual guidance during the thick woods at night. They might not have any sort of weapon for protection, even though there were physical dangers such as wild animals, snakes, slave catchers, etc. They may be fleeing with only the clothing on their back, which most likely was not ideal for protecting them from whatever weather they faced (from extreme heat to freezing temperatures.) Additional considerations included wild animals, snakes, poisonous plants, and bugs. Freedom seekers also had to consider how and where they would attain food, clean drinking water, and shelter.
  - In addition, there were often psychological and emotional difficulties, such as fear for the safety of family a runaway may have left behind. Keep in mind that for many, even upon reaching freedom, they would worry for loved ones and possibly experience PTSD from the experience of enslavement.
- Given the great danger and difficulty in running away, what skills and dispositions would an enslaved person need to have to be successful?

#### **Exploring Primary Sources – Halifax County Runaway Ads**

5. Distribute a copy of the attached “Exploring Primary Sources-Runaway Ads” worksheet to each student, and working individually or in partners, have them review runaway ads that involve Halifax County, NC. Copies of runaway slave notices from North Carolina can be accessed via [UNCG’s NC Runaway Slave](#)

[Advertisements database](#). (The available ads can be sorted by specific counties.) Teachers can either print the specific ads students will review, or have them access the site directly if devices with internet access are available. Instruct students to closely and respectfully examine these notices, reminding them of the harsh reality that these words were actually printed in various papers from 1750 - 1865. For many of these individuals, this is the only record of their entire life.

6. Go over the instructions on the worksheet with students, ensuring they understand the difference in evidence and inference, and assign each student or pair an ad to review. Recommended advertisements with connections to Halifax that specifically illustrate themes that students have been learning about (i.e., the skills of those enslaved, their proclivity to seek out family, etc.) include:
  - [Levi, 1797](#)
  - [Isaac, 1800](#)
  - [William, 1801](#)
  - [John, 1817](#)
  - [Rickey, 1827](#)
  - [William, 1832](#)
  - [Piety, 1808](#) and again in [1824](#)
    - The ads for Piety, also known as Patsy Young, tell an incredible story of a strong, brave and resilient woman. She escaped the first time in 1808 and was captured after 16 years in the town of Halifax. After being re-enslaved, she escaped again in 1823, this time with a four-year-old child. Her owner's executor believed that she might again be in the area of Halifax, or in the town itself. She was believed to be "passing" as a free woman, and the ad makes clear that she was bright, intelligent, and highly skilled (seamstress, baker, and beer brewer are all noted.)
  - [Polly, 1826](#)
7. After students have had time to review their ad and answer the corresponding questions, have students report to the entire class on the individuals they learned about. (Ideally, teachers will project the image of each ad up front as students share.) Make sure to push students to focus on the various skills those enslaved possessed, what we can learn about these courageous individuals by these ads, as well as how we might think of those who resisted slavery by "stealing their freedom." Further discuss:
  - Unfortunately, for many of these brave freedom seekers, these ads are the only record of their life. But, how accurate is the source based on who created it and why? (The discussion can go both ways. Given the oppressive structure of enslavement, owners would never truly know the enslaved. Yet, on the other hand, we can glean some of what made freedom seekers special, resilient, talented, etc.)
  - What can we learn about slavery, freedom seeking and the Underground Railroad, from these advertisements?
  - Based on your research of these primary source documents, would you add anything to our earlier discussion of what skills and dispositions an enslaved person would need to have to be successful?

### **History & Memory: Elevating the Black History of Halifax, NC**

8. As a culminating activity, provide the attached assignment, **History & Memory**, which contains an actual article excerpt about Historic Halifax's desire to design and purchase signage to tell the stories and highlight the rich history of enslaved and free people in Halifax County and along the Roanoke River. Either individually or in teams, students should read the article then put themselves in the position of the director of Historic Halifax as they consider the final plan for the signage. Students should think through the questions provided, then create a "prototype" sketch of what they envision one of the final signs

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looking like. The sketch should include any text, images, features, etc. that they want the final product to have, as well as share details to the side of things like the size and location of the actual piece once created.

9. On the due date, teachers can have students post their work around the classroom then do a “gallery walk” to observe their classmates’ work. Students should take notes as they browse, dictating both what they learned from and liked about various sketches. Teachers can then optionally have the class vote on which sketches they feel are most powerful. After students have completed their review of each other’s work, close with a discussion of history and memory:
  - Halifax is largely known for its colonial history, and the Halifax Resolves. Why is it so critical to also elevate the rich Black history of the area?
  - Consider the concern that historic sites and educational installments in general, sometimes “whitewash” the history (meaning, they downplay or even ignore the parts of history that make people uncomfortable.) Why do you think this is the case?
10. As the article in the History & Memory assignment noted, several sites in the area of Halifax, including **Old Town Halifax, the Roanoke River, and the Roanoke Canal Trail** are designated sites on the [National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom \(NTF\)](#). The mission of NTF is to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues to inspire people worldwide. Through its mission, the NTF helps to advance the idea that all human beings embrace the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression. Additional sites in the area, such as **Rich Square Friends Meeting House** (across the Roanoke River in Northampton County) are part of the NC African American Heritage Commission’s [Freedom Roads Trail](#). Allow students to discuss additional ways the area and the state as a whole might elevate and celebrate its rich and diverse history.

# Halifax County, the Roanoke River and Freedom Seeking

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Warm Up:** Outline Halifax County on the map, highlight the route of the Roanoke River, and label the location of the town of Halifax with a star. Based on the location, why do you think many freedom seekers journeyed to the Halifax area?

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**Halifax County, NC**, is situated along the **Roanoke River** in northeastern North Carolina. The county, the town by the same name, and the river played a vital role in the lives of free and enslaved Black people, as well as in the **Maritime Underground Railroad in North Carolina**. Three sites throughout Halifax County, in fact, are designated sites for the National Park Service’s Network to Freedom: **The Roanoke Canal, Roanoke River, and Historic Halifax**. All were all part of the NC Underground Railroad’s complex transportation network.

Halifax grew to have one of the largest free Black communities in North Carolina, had a large skilled class of enslaved and free artisans, and existed in close proximity to an active, abolitionist Quaker population. The combination of these communities, along with the geographical location of Halifax to the Roanoke River and connecting bodies of water, made the area a prime stop and destination for freedom seekers.

### Black Peoples’ Skills Fulfill Labor Needs

The diverse skills of enslaved people and free Blacks formed the labor source for much of the lifestyle and economy throughout the history of Halifax County.

When enslaved African people were brought to the colonies, they came with vast skills and knowledge, including that of Africa’s fishing cycles. Many honed their seafaring skills along North Carolina’s bodies of water (some with help from indigenous communities), and their labor and talent became a commodity for Carolina colonists and plantation owners in eastern NC. Along the Roanoke River, for instance, enslaved boatmen dared harrowing rapids and racing currents to transport tobacco from the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains to the North Carolina seaports, and by the early nineteenth-century, the local economy increasingly relied on the talent and labor of the Black community.

Counties and towns such as Halifax, adjacent to water such as Roanoke River, thus saw enslaved and free Blacks increase in population. Black and multi-racial people from all backgrounds could be found as ship artisans, boat pilots, sail makers, caulkers, and dock workers laboring in eastern NC. Some were enslaved - sometimes accompanying their owners, running errands, or working on the docks and warehouses. Some were hired out as laborers and craftsmen. Others were free, owning property and their own businesses.

One of the largest projects on the Roanoke River was the building of the **Roanoke Canal** in Halifax County. Like many navigation companies in the south during slavery, the Roanoke River Navigation Company (chartered in 1817) employed both slave and free laborers. While the work was incredibly hard and dangerous, it also provided enslaved canal workers a means to escape via the waterway. It is also worth noting that the Canal is said to contain some of the most impressive and best-preserved nineteenth century canal construction in the nation.

The skills of the Black community ultimately provided the spark for innovation in fishing and boatbuilding for generations to come.

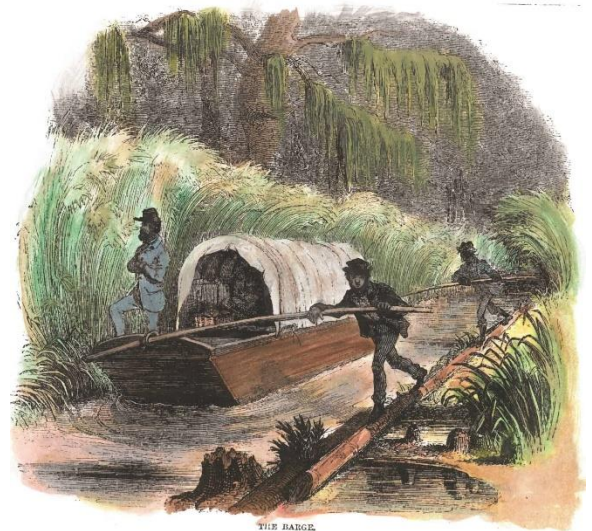
**Summarize the types of skills, knowledge, intelligences, etc. that enslaved and free Blacks had and contributed to Halifax County and beyond:**

### **Freedom Seekers & the Underground Railroad**

Given the geography and community that formed in Halifax and along the Roanoke River, it is not surprising that these were active sites for freedom seekers and NC's Underground Railroad network.

While their skills and talent were viewed as necessary to white society, Black watermen also posed a constant danger to the power of slaveholders. Their work on the water covertly linked enslaved people along the Roanoke River and throughout the Albemarle Sound vicinity, proving the ability for those enslaved and free to spread news, messages and inspiration for liberty among plantations and towns.

Enslaved people also used their knowledge of the river to assist in escapes. Those who had previously piloted their masters' vessels could apply their maritime skills to gain their freedom. The river also provided protection from "pattyrollers" or slave patrols and helped speed escapes to urban areas, swamps, the sounds, open seas, and points northward to freedom.



The taverns, print shops, and docks in towns such as Halifax also served as major sources of information that could be crucial to the success or failure of a freedom seeker. When freedom seekers reached the town, the large community of free Blacks, enslaved people and white allies such as anti-slavery Quakers often provided important news, assisted with communication for secret activities, helped conceal escapees, or helped them on their way to other places.

A community of anti-slavery **Quakers** (members of the **Rich Square Friends Meeting House** across the Roanoke River in Northampton County) were believed to have assisted over 300 freedom seekers. The home of Henry Sr. and Dorothy Copeland for instance, though it burned down in 1975, had a secret hiding place to protect enslaved people seeking freedom. Quakers Isaac and Jane Parker were believed to have "sheltered 'passengers' in their barn, and sometimes disguised the women in Quaker bonnets and shawls." Considering the close proximity of Rich Square to the town of Halifax there is a possibility that many freedom seekers in Halifax who wanted to continue their escape steered water vessels or hired someone to do so in order to meet with the Quakers.

It is important to note however that historians believe that the majority of assistance given to runaways came from other enslaved people and free Blacks. Many freedom seekers who came to the town of Halifax were assisted in hiding their enslaved status, gaining employment, or escaping farther North if desired.

Freedom seekers ran to the town of Halifax from places such as Raleigh, Tarboro, Edenton, Fayetteville, Newbern, and Salisbury, many of which also had Underground Railroad activity. As demonstrated in the narrative of **James Williams**, freedom seekers also ran from distant places such as Alabama. In 1838, Williams spoke of his perilous journey:



“...the thought of being again made a slave, and of suffering the horrible punishment of a runaway, restrained me. I lay in the woods all that day without food. The next evening, I soon found a pile of excellent apples, from which I supplied myself. The next evening I reached Halifax Court House, and I then knew that I was near Virginia. On the 7th of October, I came to the Roanoke, and crossed it in the midst of a violent storm of rain and thunder. The current ran so furiously that I was carried down with it, and with great difficulty, and in a state of complete exhaustion, reached the opposite shore.”

Slave runaway advertisements were posted in newspapers all across North Carolina. Based on the number of runaway slave ads indicating the town of Halifax as a final destination, Halifax provided a safe refuge for freedom seekers. Approximately 59 runaway slave advertisements from 1791 to 1840 were posted for 70 freedom seekers running to the town of Halifax. Slave owners specified in the runaway ads that freedom seekers ran to the town of Halifax for many reasons and utilized many skills to do so. Phrases found in the ads include: *he has a trade, has a fraudulent pass, can read, secured or hidden by someone in Halifax, seen with others passing as a free person*, and more.

The common denominators in the majority of the escapes on the Roanoke River (as well as others such as the Neuse and Pasquotank) is that enslaved people needed and wanted to be with their families, wanted freedom, and attempted repeated escapes regardless of the consequences.

**In what ways did enslaved people, freedom seekers, and free Blacks use their knowledge and skills to resist the oppressive situations in which they were placed?**

**Based on what you’ve learned thus far, as well as on the account of freedom seeker James Williams, what was the reality of running away like? What types of traits would a person need to be successful at gaining their freedom in this way?**

### Largest Population of Free Blacks in North Carolina

Review the chart of Halifax County’s population between 1790 – 1860 below. Note 1-2 observations regarding the population that you notice:

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Year	Free White			Free Colored			Slave			Totals	
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Free	County
1790	3613	3403	7016	n/a	n/a	443	n/a	n/a	6506	7459	13965
1800	3043	3028	6071	n/a	n/a	635	n/a	n/a	7239	6706	13945
1810	2897	2863	5760	n/a	n/a	1236	n/a	n/a	6624	6996	13620
1820	3316	3055	6371	749	802	1551	4848	4602	9450	7922	17372
1830	2971	2919	5890	1006	1073	2079	4897	4893	9790	7969	17759
1840	2672	2946	5618	881	956	1837	4706	4697	9403	7455	16858
1850	2838	2927	5765	869	1001	1870	4442	4512	8954	7635	16589
1860	3316	3325	6641	1209	1243	2452	5144	5205	10349	9093	19442

Halifax County had one of the highest populations of free Blacks in North Carolina, along with an enslaved population nearly double that of the white population by 1860. As the number grew with each decade, it was not certain as to how many of the free Blacks were actually runaways “passing as free,” however. The statistics show that it could be less conspicuous for freedom seekers to “hide” in Halifax and blend in with the existing Black population, free and enslaved alike. During this time, it was common for slave owners to “rent out slaves,” thus the face of a new Black person would not necessarily be assumed to be a runaway.

What made the area so compelling? In addition to the geography and community that formed, Historian John Hope Franklin noted: “North Carolina was lagging behind the other states in the enactment of harsh legislation affecting free Blacks.” When such laws were passed, they were often ignored or enforced very poorly. As long as free Blacks (even though many were actually runaways) were self-sufficient, their position in the society was often secure. As indicated in the slave runaway ads for Halifax, a majority of freedom seekers were skilled with a trade that provided them with a steady income, so many were able to find work on a nearby plantation or in one of the town’s shops and blend in.

**What were the various ways those enslaved sought their freedom?**

**Who were the people responsible for aiding freedom seekers and helping to ensure their success?**

**What made the Halifax area so compelling that its Black population grew to outnumber its white population?**

**In what ways does what you have read about differ from the classic image of enslaved people working in plantation fields? What are some of the ways that enslaved people, through their own agency and skills, managed to carve out spaces of independence?**

**What do you think is most important to know about freedom seekers? Why is it important that we know about and understand this part of our history?**

Sources:

- [https://www.nps.gov/subjects/uqrr/discover\\_history/underground\\_map.htm](https://www.nps.gov/subjects/uqrr/discover_history/underground_map.htm)
- <http://www.halifaxundergroundrr.com>
- *Application to National Park Service for the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom for Old Town Halifax and the Roanoke Canal*

Sample Images

Halifax Swamp Land



Source: <https://www.nccoast.org/project/nrcs/>

**Sample Images**

**Roanoke River**



**Examining Primary Sources – Halifax County Runaway Ads**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Review the runaway ad provided to you and answer the questions.

- If the question can be answered by specific statements/evidence written directly in the ad, check the evidence blank and note the evidence underneath.
- If the text of the ad does not specifically address the question, make an inference (educated guess) based on what you have learned regarding slavery and answer underneath, checking the inference blank.
- In some cases, your answer may be based on both evidence and inference.

- **What is the enslaved person's name\*?** \_\_\_\_\_  
*(\*If more than one enslaved person is sought in the ad, list all names)*

- **What year was the ad placed?** \_\_\_\_\_

- **What was taking place around this time in Halifax, in North Carolina, and throughout the south?**

- **What skills did the person possess?** \_\_\_\_\_Evidence \_\_\_\_\_Inference \_\_\_\_\_Both

- **How did the person escape?** \_\_\_\_\_Evidence \_\_\_\_\_Inference \_\_\_\_\_Both

- **What was the person's life like while enslaved?  
How were they treated?** \_\_\_\_\_Evidence \_\_\_\_\_Inference \_\_\_\_\_Both

- **Why did the person choose to run away? What were they  
risking in doing so?** \_\_\_\_\_Evidence \_\_\_\_\_Inference \_\_\_\_\_Both

- **What additional ways did the person resist slavery beyond  
seeking freedom?** \_\_\_\_\_Evidence \_\_\_\_\_Inference \_\_\_\_\_Both

- **Considering the ad and your interpretation, how would you characterize the enslaved person(s) described and why? (Consider the skills, traits, adversity faced, etc. and list at least 4 adjectives in your reasoning.)**

**History & Memory: Elevating the Black History of Halifax, NC** Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**I. Read this article excerpt from rrspin.com, A river to freedom: Roanoke and freed slaves, written by [Lance Martin](#) on August 14, 2010.**

Newspaper ads proclaim runaway slaves may have fled to **Mush Island**. There is documentation of one master watching his slave drift away across the river on his own barge. These are the things that have earned the **Roanoke River** a National Park Service designation as a National Underground Railroad Network site. The designation recognizes different sites throughout the country as being significant to the movement to free slaves. North Carolina has the most sites in the Southeast.

In a presentation to the Halifax County Genealogical Society about the program, Wanda McLean of Elizabeth City said a look at historical markers in the area often tells the story of that place.

“The Roanoke River valley was full of plantations. There were hundreds and hundreds of plantations along the river. If you see a plantation you can bet there was an underground railroad.”

Historic Halifax thus hopes to buy a series of signs to note the significance of the river to the underground railroad. Total cost of the signs is \$2,894.

“The Roanoke River joins Halifax to the Northampton County burial site of Henry and Dorothy Copeland as a site important to the freeing of slaves. The Copelands were Quakers and members of the Rich Square Meeting House, where some 300 slaves were helped to freedom in NC’s Underground Railroad,” said Monica Moody, of the Historic Halifax Site.

A meeting attendee, Gary Grant of nearby Tillery asked McLean if the project “whitewashes slavery.”

“It lifts some burden that it wasn’t that bad. If we have a history, it needs to be a complete history. There were some harrowing stories of slaves at Tillery,” he said.

McLean explained the National Park Service’s goal: “The National Park Service wants to put emphasis on the escapes. They don’t want to put emphasis on the cruelty.”

**II. Imagine that you are the director of Historic Halifax, as you work to finalize the signs and secure the funds to have them designed. As you work on a written plan, answer the following questions on separate paper.**

- Halifax is largely known for its colonial history and the Halifax Resolves. What specific aspects of the rich Black history of the area do you think these signs should highlight?
- What do you think the purpose of these signs should be?
- Consider the concern that installments like this, and historic sites in general, sometimes “whitewash” the history (meaning, they downplay or even ignore the parts of history that make people uncomfortable.) How can you ensure this is not the case with your signage, while also highlighting the resistance, courageous escapes and fortitude of Black people, as the National Park Service emphasizes?
- How might you raise the money for these signs?

**III. Create a sketch of one of the signs that you would provide to an artist to work from in creating the actual signs. Your sketch should illustrate the overall design, shape, location, special features, imagery, and text that the final created sign will be based on.**