

Civic Hall Performing Arts Center

2023-2024 Educational Programming



February 16, 2024

12:30pm

4th-6th Grades

Allan Harris has created an epic song cycle portraying the life and struggles of an African-American cowboy during the slavery and early Reconstruction years. **Cross That River** represents a significant moment in American History, and tells a story that has never been told. The unsettled West of the 1860's provides a new life and new dreams for *Blue*, a run-away slave, who escapes from slavery to Texas to become one of America's first Black Cowboys. This compelling tale of freedom integrates fiction with historical fact, and each song presents a different page in this complicated chapter of American History. The story of *Blue* begins in Louisiana, and with every song of this highly-infectious score, the audience is moved further along on Blue's harrowing journey across the Sabine River to freedom in the Wild West. Show length 60 minutes. At 6:00pm there will be a full length Family version of the show including a pre-show presented by the Levi & Catharine Coffin House from here in Wayne County.

Levi & Catharine Coffin House

From the outside it looks like a normal, beautifully-restored, Federal-style brick home built in 1839. On the inside, however, it has some unusual features that served an important purpose in American history. This eight-room home served as a safe haven for more than 1,000 freedom-seekers on their journey to Canada. Levi and Catharine Coffin's home became known as "The Grand Central Station of the Underground Railroad."

Being a Quaker home, the Coffin house would not have had many of the era's decorative features such as narrow columns, delicate beading or dentil trim. During the 20 years they lived in Newport (now Fountain City), the Coffins worked to provide transportation, shelter, food and clothing to more than 1,000 freedom-seekers. Many of their stories are told in Levi Coffin's 1876 Memoir, *Reminiscences*.

For their journeys north, Freedom-seekers often used three main routes to cross from slavery to freedom—through Madison or Jeffersonville in Indiana, or Cincinnati, Ohio. From these points, slaves traveled to Newport through the Underground Railroad. The Coffins' "station" was so successful that every person who passed through eventually reached freedom.

The location of the house, on Highway 27 at the center of an abolitionist Quaker community, allowed the entire community to act as lookouts for the Coffins and give them plenty of warning when bounty hunters came into town.

The Coffin House was ranked as "one of the nation's Top 25 Historical Sites" by the History Channel. In 2016, the Smithsonian named the Levi Coffin House Interpretive Center "one of 12 new museums around the world to visit," while the Indiana Office of Tourism Development voted it as one of the top museums in the State of Indiana.