



SOLOMON KING: FROM THERE TO HERE





My name is Solomon King and I am nine years old.

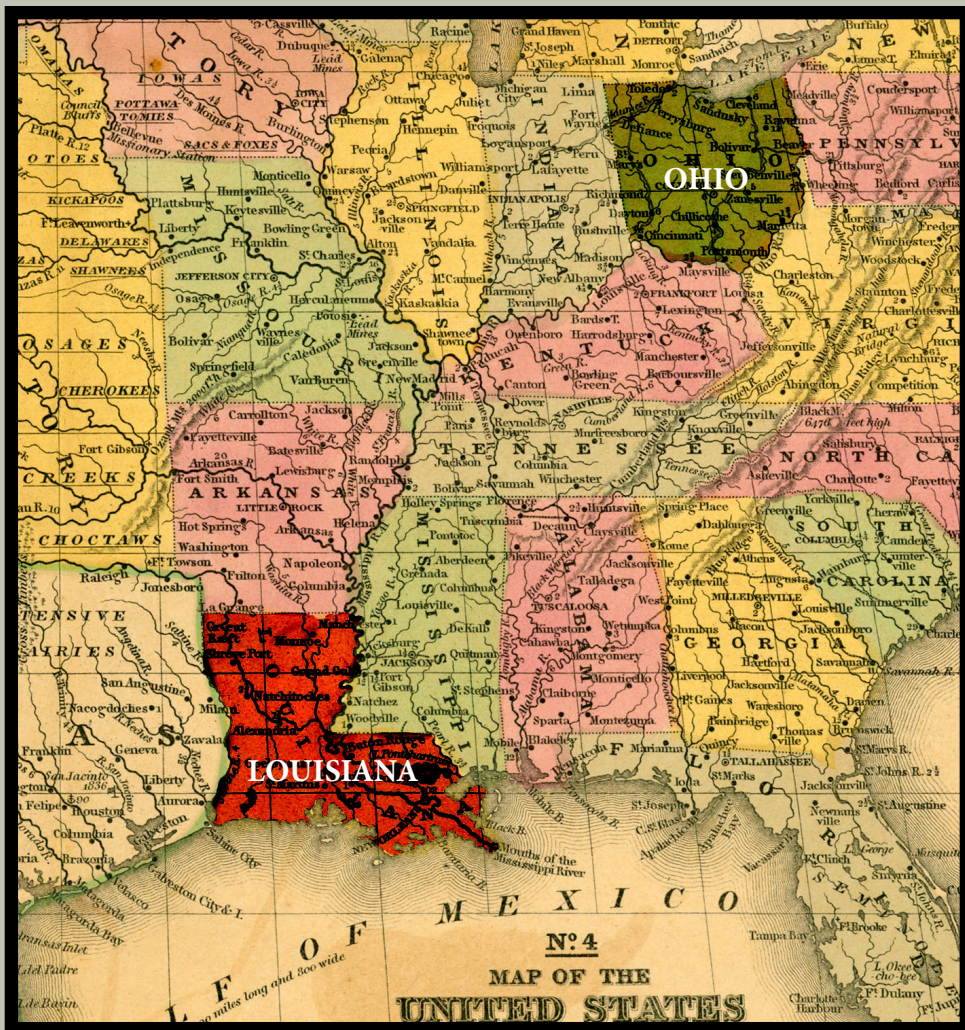
I'm going to tell you about the big adventure I had when I was just a little boy.

The first thing I remember about it was my mama crying and carrying on.

“Please mister,” she said. “I can't leave without my baby!”

That's when I knew she was talking about me. Course I wasn't a baby - I was four years old, but you know what mothers are like.

My ears pricked up then and I tried to figure



out what was happening.

Where could Mama be going? As long as I could remember we lived in the same little house on the plantation in Louisiana.

Mama, whose real name is Eliza, calls it 'Wee-siana,' but I learned in school it's called Louisiana, but I'm not bothered to correct Mama.

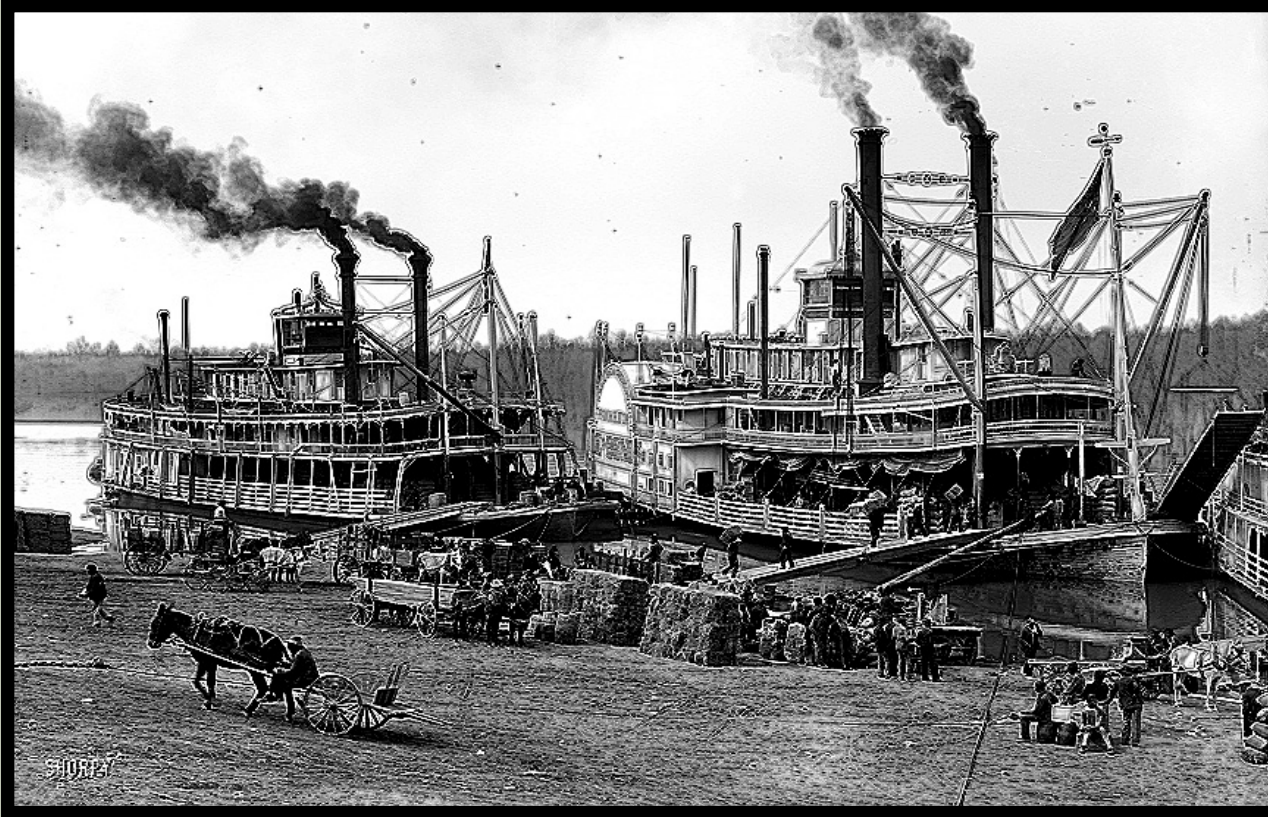
Seems like Reverend King was moving all his slaves to a faraway place called Ohio, but he didn't own me so I might have to stay behind. That's why Mama was carrying on. Finally Mr. King gave in and said he'd pay \$150 so I could go with Mama. That was real nice of him.

If I had \$150 I don't think I'd buy a boy. I'd rather have a horse.

Even if I wanted to buy a boy, I couldn't. People aren't for sale in Canada, which is the way I think it should be everywhere.

But that was just the beginning of the big adventure.

Me and Mama, my sister Amelia, my brother Cornelius and Reverend King's 11 other slaves rode in wagons all the way to the Mississippi



River. I can spell Mississippi backwards -- ippississiM -- and when we got there, we all climbed onto a huge steamboat.

I had never seen such a big boat before and even if I had, I wouldn't believe I'd ever take a ride on one.

We all carried our own bundles onto the boat.

Mine was the smallest one. All I had was two shirts, one trousers and three extra underpants. Plus I had my slingshot which I wrapped up in one of my underpants so Mama wouldn't see it.

Peter made it for me -- he was the only other boy on our trip, but he's older than me. Him and me went squirrel hunting with our slingshots one day in Louisiana, but we didn't hit anything except Peter almost hit Amelia

by mistake and Peter's mother, who is called Fanny, took his slingshot away.

I didn't think that was right. Amelia was spying on us and Peter didn't even know she was behind that tree when he took his shot.

That's why I have to hide mine. If I hit anybody with a slingshot, even by accident, Mama

would tan my hide but good.

Reverend King didn't have a bundle. He had a wooden trunk with his name right on it and some fancy bags that the men helped him carry on the boat.

Mama kept telling me to stay right by her, but there was a lot of things to look at and Peter's mama let him go explore and finally Mama said I could too, as long as Amelia went with me.

"But don't go near the rail!" she said.

Course, once we got out of eyeshot that's the first thing me and Peter did. We poked our heads through the rails and spat right in the water. Then Peter climbed up on top of it but I said I wasn't going to.

Peter thought I was being a baby, but all I could think was if I fell in and got my clothes all wet, Mama would go into my things and sure enough, she would find my underpants with the



slingshot in it.

So, I stayed in the boat and Peter climbed down and pretty soon we had seen what there was to see. Amelia said she was going to tell Mama we spat in the water but then Peter said if she didn't he would make her something pretty.

I think she likes Peter, so she said she wouldn't tell but I don't think he ever did make her something pretty. The only other girl in the group was Sarah, who always likes to boss everybody around.

The best part was the big wheel which Mr. Talbert said is the thing that moves the boat. Mr. Talbert was one of Reverend King's other slaves and he knows a lot of things.

He told Peter and me that steam makes the wheel go around and the wheel pushes the boat forward in the water.

Once the boat started moving, I could see he was right.

The boat made lots of sounds, but the loudest was the *splash splash splash* of the wheel. At first I liked it a lot, but that first night when I tried to go to sleep, it kept me awake. After the



first couple of days, I didn't even notice it anymore.

It was a long trip on the boat and there wasn't a lot for me and Peter to do.

Sometimes Mr. Jacob would tell us stories like Robin Hood who stole from the rich and

gave to the poor. Other times, Mr. Ben would tell stories, but they were always Bible stories. I liked Mr. Jacob's stories better.

Our boat sailed all the way up the Mississippi River to the Ohio River.

Finally, the boat sailed into Ohio and we had another wagon ride to get to Reverend King's

farm.

That farm was a lot different than the plantation we lived on back in Louisiana. For one thing, there was no sugar canes anywhere.

Mama and the other adults were worried the slave catchers would find us, but Reverend King said the white men nearby would keep an eye on things while he was gone to Canada and that we would be safe.

We stayed in Ohio for more than a year and the men learned how to farm different crops and how to chop down trees and make cabins. I wanted to learn how to chop down trees but Mama said I wasn't allowed to even touch an axe because I would chop my leg off.

Mama and the other ladies learned lots of new things too, like how to make strawberry jam and put up peaches for the winter. Sometimes I helped them, but I didn't like to because Peter got to chop wood and sometimes he laughed at



me for helping the ladies.

I guess winter was the biggest surprise for all of us. In Louisiana, there were times when it was



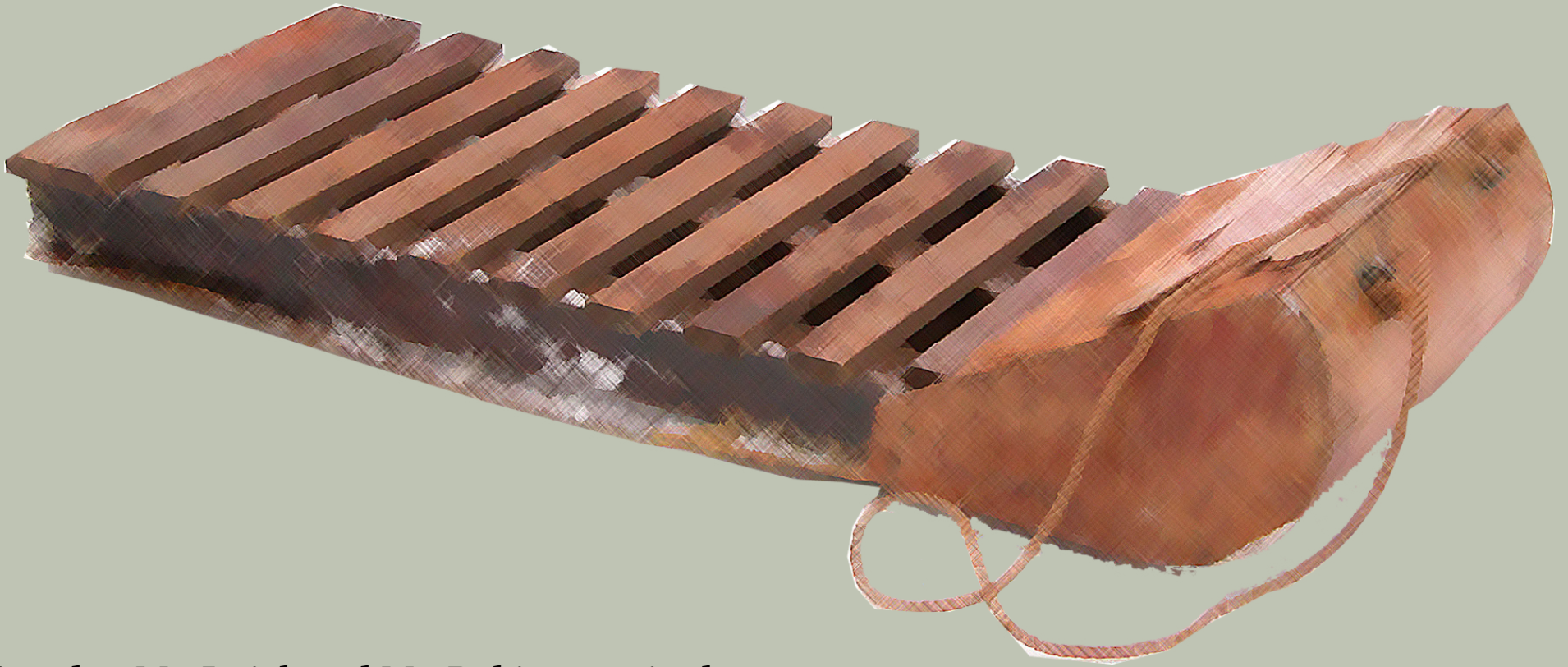
cold, but I never saw cold like they had in Ohio.

Lucky the men were getting so good at chopping down wood because once winter hit that first year, we had to burn wood like nobody's business just to keep warm.

And then it snowed.

None of us had ever seen snow before and let me tell you, we all danced around outside, catching snowflakes on our tongues, until we were too cold to be outside anymore.

That first snowfall melted away the next day, but a few weeks later the snow began coming and didn't melt away that whole winter.



One day, Mr. Isaiah and Mr. Robin surprised us with a sled they made from wood. Mama gave them some beeswax to rub on it and we went sledding whenever we had the chance.

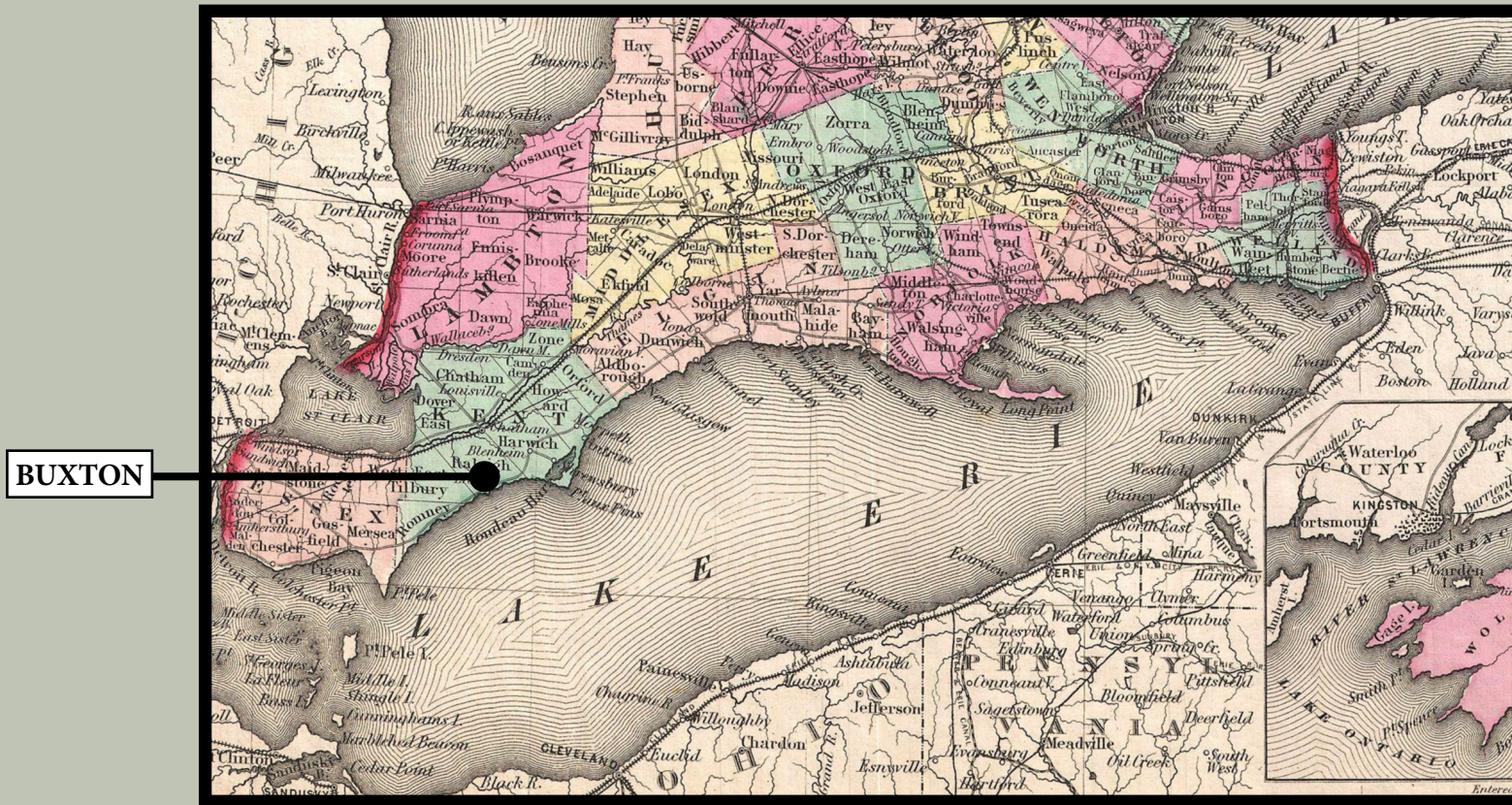
Even Sarah forgot she was trying to be a lady and laughed and laughed whenever she fell off the sled.

While we were in Ohio, all of us learned to read

and write and we went to church every Sunday.

Finally, Reverend King came back for us and we were getting ready to go to Canada.

We already knew that a lot of slaves wanted to go to Canada and Reverend King's farm in Ohio was part of the Underground Railroad.



It wasn't a real railroad, with trains and tracks, but it was a secret way for slaves to go to the free states and Canada.

Other people helped the slaves who were brave enough to run away to freedom and most of the time they escaped. One time a slave catcher got a runaway slave and the adults talked about it so quiet we never did find out what happened

to him.

Some people called Canada The Promised Land, and some people called it Heaven because everyone who went to Canada was free, even slaves like us.

When we were in Ohio, Reverend King told us we weren't slaves anymore, but it wasn't really



true. The slave catchers could still get us and take us back to Louisiana.

Once we crossed the border into Canada, we really were free. Everyone was whooping and hollering, but some people, especially Old Stephen, couldn't understand they were completely free.

When we first came to Buxton in 1849, there wasn't too much here. Mr. Riley and his family already built their cabin and were farming and there were a few more cabins partway up. Mostly there was trees and not too far away was the lake.

Now there are plenty of families here and I

go to school every day. I like Canada, but I wouldn't call it Heaven. I don't think you'd have to go to school every day in Heaven.

Sometimes, when the sun is shining bright and I'm sitting at my desk working on my sums, I think it might be better to be working in the fields cutting sugar cane, but I don't say that to Mama.

She tells me I can be whatever I want to be, but I don't think she'd be too happy if I said I wanted to be outside cutting sugar cane.

Maybe I'll be a cooper when I grow up. That's someone who makes barrels. We have a cooper in Buxton and I like to watch him turning wood and metal into big barrels and butter churns. Sometimes he lets me help him.

We also have a store and a mill. We even have our own hotel here and a post office, but I like the store the best. Sometimes Mama gives me a penny and I can buy myself a peppermint stick

there. Maybe I'll have my own store when I grow up. Then I could have all the peppermint sticks I wanted. Or maybe I'll be a soldier, or a farmer.

Mama says if I get myself a good education, there'll be no stopping me. I suppose she's right, but she doesn't know how hard it is for a boy to sit in school all day when the sun is shining.

And that's my story of how me and Peter and everybody else who used to be a slave came all the way from Louisiana in the United States of America to this place in Buxton, Canada.

Solomon stayed in school and received his 'good education.'

In 1863, at age 20, he became a recruiting officer with the 102nd Coloured infantry of the Union Army, out of Detroit, Michigan.