



## John Rankin

Topic Guide for Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>)

### Introduction

John Rankin (1793-1886) was a key figure in the Underground Railroad and abolition movement. Born in Tennessee, Rankin became a Presbyterian minister in 1814 and courageously spoke from the pulpit against slavery. The church elders told him to stop or to leave Tennessee; Rankin felt he could not stop and so moved his family to Ripley, Ohio, over New Year's in 1821-1822, after a four-year stay in Kentucky where he presided over an anti-slavery congregation. In 1829, the Rankin family moved to the house on Liberty Hill which would become an Underground Railroad stop. Rankin wrote letters against slavery to his slave-holding brother; eventually these were published in a newspaper and later as a book. In the 1830s, because of his outspoken abolitionist views, a bounty of \$3,000 was put on Rankin's life. Due to opposition within, Rankin left his congregation in 1846 and went on to form what became the Free Presbyterian Church. He died in 1892.

### Important Dates

- February 4 or 5, 1793: John Rankin is born in Dandridge, Jefferson County, Tennessee.
- December 31, 1821-January 1, 1822: Rankin and family cross the Ohio River and move to Ripley, Ohio.
- 1826: *Letters on Slavery*, a collection of letters originally sent to Rankin's brother, is published.
- 1829: Rankin family moves to new home on Liberty Hill.
- 1833: Rankin creates the American Anti-Slavery Society with Theodore Weld.
- 1836: Rankin joins "the Seventy," a group of speakers travelling the northern states calling for immediate emancipation, and helping found local Anti-Slavery Societies.
- 1846: After 24 years, Rankin resigns from his church due to opposition within the congregation. With one-third of his former congregants, forms what would become the Free Presbyterian Church.
- 1850: The Fugitive Slave Law is passed which increased the danger for assisting runaway slaves.
- March 18, 1886: Rankin dies.
- May 1892: "Freedom's Heroes" monument to Rankin dedicated in Ripley's Maplewood Cemetery.
- 2013: Rankin is inducted into National Abolition Hall of Fame in Petersboro, New York.

### Suggested Search Strategies

- Try the following terms in combination (as an "all" word search), proximity or as phrases: John Rankin, Anti-Slavery Society, Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, *Letters on Slavery*.
- Search newspapers in all states, not just Ohio.

### Sample Articles from Chronicling America

- "[Abolition in the Churches](#)" *Vermont Telegraph* (Brandon, VT), May 1, 1839, Image 1, col. 3-4.
- "[A Hard Case](#)" *Anti-Slavery Bugle* (New Lisbon, OH), June 16, 1855, Image 3, col. 2.
- "[A Few Words to the Colored People of the United States](#)" *Highland Weekly News* (Hillsborough, OH), October 2, 1873, Image 1, col. 4.
- "[Biography of Rev. John Rankin](#)" *Emporia News* (Emporia, KS), April 2, 1875, Image 1, col. 1.
- "[Escape of Eliza](#)" *News-Herald* (Hillsboro, OH), January 16, 1896, Image 8, col. 2.