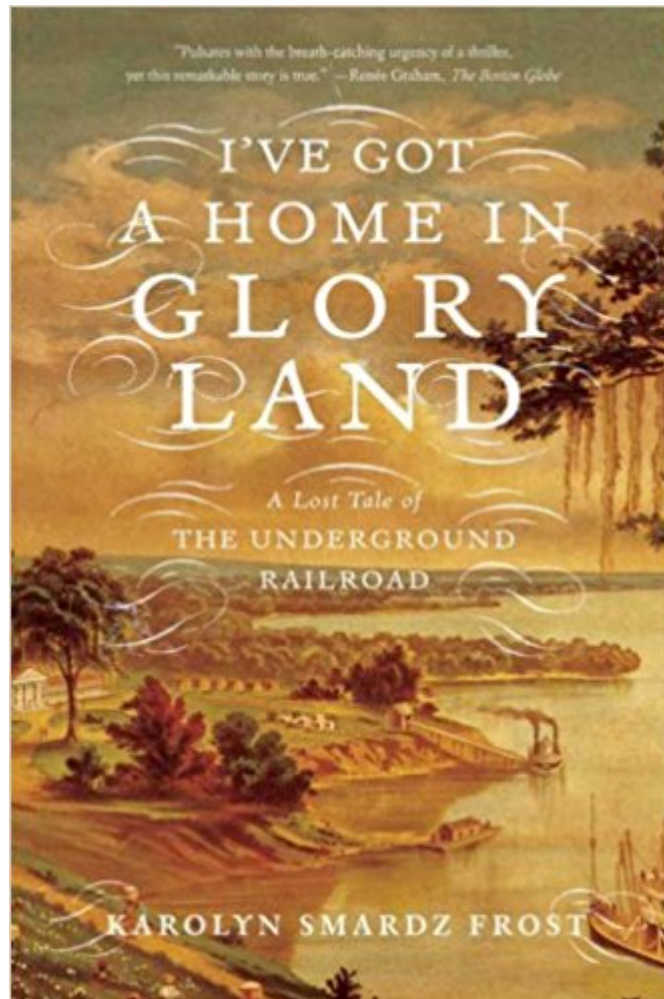


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I've Got A Home In Glory Land: A Lost Tale Of The Underground Railroad



Synopsis

It was the day before Independence Day, 1833. As his bride, Lucie, was about to be sold down the river, Thornton Blackburn planned a daring and successful daylight escape from their Louisville masters. Pursued to Michigan, the couple was captured and sentenced to return to Kentucky in chains. But Detroit's black community rallied to their cause in the Blackburn Riots of 1833, the first racial uprising in the city's history. Thornton and Lucie were spirited across the river to Canada, but their safety proved illusory when Michigan's governor demanded their extradition. Canada's defense of the Blackburns set the tone for all future diplomatic relations with the United States over the thorny issue of the fugitive slave, and confirmed the British colony as the main terminus of the Underground Railroad. The Blackburns settled in Toronto, where they founded the city's first taxi business, but they never forgot the millions who still suffered in slavery. Working with prominent abolitionists, Thornton and Lucie made their home a haven for runaways. When they died in the 1890s with no descendants to pass on their fascinating tale, it was lost to history. Lost, that is, until archaeologists brought the story of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn again to light.

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Customer Reviews

One would have to read this book several times to completely absorb its multifarious layers, and I cannot recommend it highly enough. First and foremost, it is the compelling life story of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn. They escaped from slavery boldly using forged documents to travel by steamboat to Cincinnati (appropriately arriving on July 4) then settled in Detroit and were subsequently incarcerated under the Fugitive Slave Law. The community (white and black) rose up in their

defense, sparking what history records as "The Blackburn Riots of 1833." After their hair raising escape to Canada and subsequent incarceration while appealing extradition under provisions of the Fugitive Offenders Act, they finally settled in Toronto, where Blackburn established the first cab company. The couple acquired affluence and influence - though they always lived modestly - and assisted many other refugees escaping slavery and intolerance before, during and after the Civil War. Equally fascinating is the process by which their life story was reconstructed. Both Thornton and Lucie remained illiterate, and no one recorded their memoirs. This book is the result of over 20 years of painstaking research and - as the author states in the introduction - no small amount of "historical coalescence." It perfectly illustrates the creative approach historians must take when attempting to break through what genealogists call "The Wall of Slavery." The author relies on everything from Bibles to court documents to glean information and put all the pieces together, and her extensive bibliography alone is worth the price of the book.

Karolyn Smardz Frost's tale of the exodus of the Blackburns from America to Canada via the Underground Railroad is incredibly moving and brutal. Moving, because these people, and their mostly-unknown helpers and friends, risked everything for freedom. They found it in the Glory Land, Canada. But they didn't stop there. Thornton Blackburn actually returned to Hell to free his mother, and he and wife Lucy helped other refugee families settle in Toronto. It was no bed of roses for them in Canada, but it wasn't slavery. Any nostalgia for 'gone with the wind' depictions of antebellum Southern life is put to rest forever when you read of this brutal system that measured degrees of freedom (free blacks lived alongside slaves; slaves counted as 3/5 of a person for census purposes, giving the South more voting clout than it deserved since the '3/5 men' weren't allowed to vote; slaves could be 'hired out' to companies and taught a trade, but their wages were paid to their masters; women were raped by slavers before being sold down the river as concubines.) The book has its weaknesses. I could have done without the endless genealogies of inbred Southern planters and instead read quotes from the defense speech given by Blackburn's lawyer after the first Detroit Riot ("The Blackburn Riot") in 1833; surely that must have been printed somewhere? I'd have liked it if there were more direct quotes from the principals. And there is a bit too much of 'they might have' 'they must have' and other vagaries. True, the Blackburns could not read or write and many details of their story were not written down, but other people who traveled North could and did write about their experiences in their own words. The book will leave a bad taste in your mouth if you are from the USA.

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