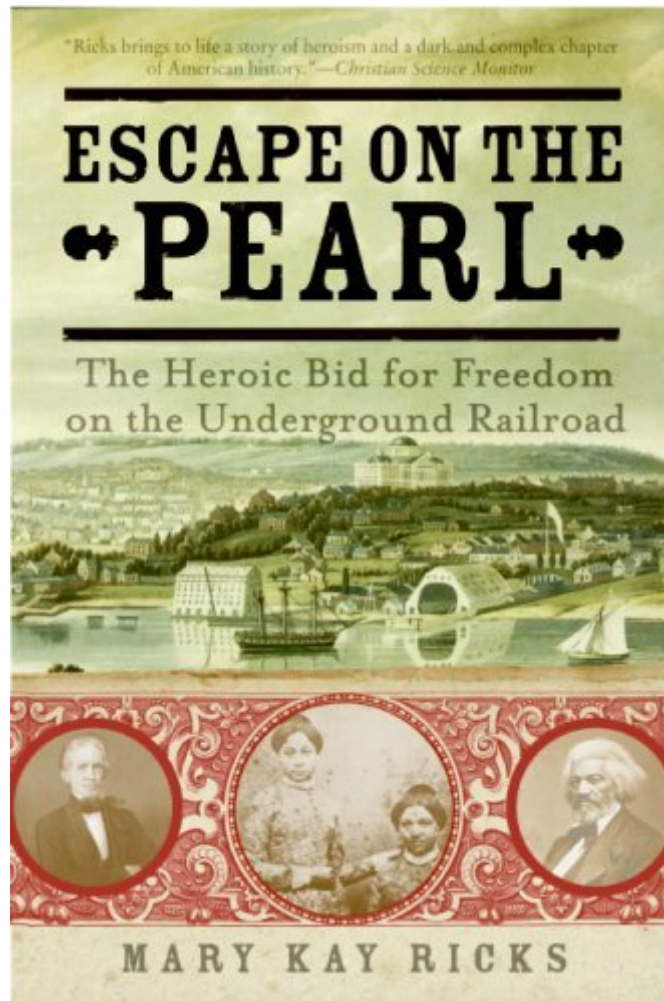


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# Escape On The Pearl: Passage To Freedom From Washington, D.C.



## Synopsis

On the evening of April 15, 1848, nearly eighty enslaved Americans attempted one of history's most audacious escapes. Setting sail from Washington, D.C., on a schooner named the Pearl, the fugitives began a daring 225-mile journey to freedom in the North and put in motion a furiously fought battle over slavery in America that would consume Congress, the streets of the capital, and the White House itself. Mary Kay Ricks's unforgettable chronicle brings to life the Underground Railroad's largest escape attempt, the seemingly immutable politics of slavery, and the individuals who struggled to end it. Escape on the Pearl reveals the incredible odyssey of those who were onboard, including the remarkable lives of fugitives Mary and Emily Edmonson, the two sisters at the heart of this true story of courage and determination.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In 1848 some residents of Washington DC owned slaves though many others opposed the "curious institution". In April, conductors on the Underground Railroad try a bold freedom run using the Pearl to take seventy-seven runaway "fugitives" to freedom in the north. However, a terrible storm on the

Chesapeake doomed the mission. The sheriff arrested the freedom fighters and took the recaptured slaves back to their owner who sent them to New Orleans for sale. Another twist returns the slaves to DC where Preacher and staunch abolitionist Henry Ward Beecher made efforts to get them freed and his daughter Harriet Beecher Stowe used their plight as part of her reference notes published as the Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, two years after the classic was released. This is a complex at times convoluted look back at a major incident of its time that has somewhat lost its significance over the subsequent century and a half. The book gets inside the heads of the slaves, slave sellers, slave owners, the Stowes and the Underground Railroad conductors. However, most fascinating besides the link to Harriet Beecher Stowe's classic is the way the citizens in the metropolitan DC area looked at slavery. Historical readers need to set aside some time because though difficult to follow because of how complex the events leading to, the event itself, and the subsequent aftereffect and outcome are, this is a discerning insightful look at the abomination of slavery. Harriet Klausner

"Escape on the Pearl" shows once again how there are so many fascinating and important stories from our history that are just waiting for a good storyteller to tell. Thankfully, Ricks has done so with the Pearl. The story she tells weaves together slavery, abolition and the politics of Washington with the personal struggles and triumphs of some very courageous people. Combining meticulous research with a passion for the subject matter, Ricks vividly recreates the events and locales in a way that brings to life these people, their hardships, and the times in which they lived. Such a moving, captivating story; so important to tell.

This is a wonderful book that combines history with a riveting story. Like Ken Burns' "Civil War" series it illuminates great themes--slavery and the battle against it--with rich detail, lovely writing and memorable, previously unknown characters. It is amazing this story hasn't been told before. It reads like a thriller as we follow the slaves on board the Pearl and their escape, wondering if they will make it. The historical sections deepen your knowledge of the characters on board the Pearl, and help you understand better the drama that follows. What is best about this book is that it is really a story about heroes--black and white. At a time when many people feel bad about America, this book reminds us how good this country can be when ordinary people make courageous choices. From a historical point of view I found Ricks' discussion about the "internal slave trade"--the selling of slaves from one part of the south to another and the way that broke up families--revelatory and heart breaking. I have read a great deal about the Civil War and slavery but I hadn't realized before how

big this "internal slave trade" was. I can't wait to share this book with my friends, and with our teenaged children. It's a gem.

The author's knowledge of her subject is remarkable, her writing is graceful, and her judgments are consistently sound. This book is a great read, an exciting tale framed by a sharp, balanced and sensible portrayal of an era of shame, ferment and change in our history. Ricks's literal knowledge of the streets of which she writes makes this book vibrate with authenticity. I enjoyed it consistently--and learned enormously from reading *Escape On The Pearl*. Since I write fictional accounts of the period myself under the pen-name Owen Parry, I realize how complex a subject this author has taken on--and I can only say that it's humbling to see another writer do a far-better job than one can ever hope to do. This book deserves wide attention and, as readers, let us hope that Ricks will return to the period for additional books in the future.

This is a gripping tale. While the book's title highlights the 1848 escape attempt on the Pearl, the contents of the book encompass much, much more. There's the story of a slave family - the Edmonsons - which Ricks follows from before the courageous but unsuccessful flight to freedom all the way into present-day Washington, DC. There's an engrossing overview of abolitionism and its fiery, impatient and ultimately triumphant adherents. Ricks presents her readers with a compelling description of the underground railway. Washington is presented as the small southern town that it was then, with illuminating detail. She brings to life the mid-nineteenth century context with its wrangling and maneuvering and unforgettable characters. It was a hell of a time and she gets it. The small hard kernel of yearning and determination that impelled this particular journey by these particular people inspires us. Here, too, is a great and continuing irony of history: Some human beings are capable of enslaving others; at the same time different human beings strive passionately to free others; still others fight to free themselves. 'Escape on the Pearl' is a terrific read.

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