

SUCCESS STORY

RAPIDES AND AVOYELLES PARISHES, LA

The 83-mile Northup Trail tells the story of Solomon Northup, a free-born African American farmer and professional violinist from New York. In 1841, he was offered a traveling musician's job and was convinced to travel to Washington D.C., where slavery was legal. While there, he was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Northup and other slaves were shipped to New Orleans by sea. During the voyage, Northup persuaded an English sailor to send Henry Northup a letter that told of his kidnapping. Henry Northup, a lawyer, was the son of the man who had once held Solomon's father as a slave and freed him. Henry Northup wanted to help, but needed to know where Solomon was.

In New Orleans, Northup was given the name "Platt" and eventually arrived in Central Louisiana where he remained a slave from 1841-1853. The Northup Trail follows his journey through Rapides and Avoyelles parishes and visits sites such as the Red River Landing in Alexandria, where Northup and three other slaves disembarked the steamer Rodolf after being sold in New Orleans and the

Epps House, where he met and confided in a Canadian-born carpenter Samuel Bass. Bass is credited with writing several letters on Northup's behalf to friends and officials in New York in hopes of finding help. Bass was in great danger by helping Northup send letters telling of his plight in Louisiana. Finally, Bass's letters reached two storekeepers in New York who knew Northup. They contacted his wife who contacted Henry Northup. This chain of events set the process in motion to free Northup. In early 1853, attorney Henry Northup arrived in Marksville, enlisted the help of local attorney John P. Waddill. The attorneys and the sheriff went to the Epps Plantation on Bayou Boeuf to find Northup. On January 4, 1853 at the Avoyelles Parish Courthouse in Marksville (another site on the trail), papers were signed and Northup was at last a free man again. Upon his return to New York, Northup chronicled his life as a slave in his memoirs, *Twelve Years a Slave*, which was made into a movie of the same name that won the Best Picture Oscar in 2013. Twenty-two signs mark the stops of the Northup Trail, which starts in Alexandria and then goes to Louisiana State University at Alexandria, Cheneyville, Evergreen and Mansura before ending in Marksville.



IMPACT STATEMENT

- Trails are an ideal way for travelers to learn the many stories behind the state and its communities. Travelers can take the off-the-beaten path roadways that lead to special places that tell special stories...the Louisiana story.
- The interest in the Northup Trail, spurred in large part by the critically acclaimed movie based on Northup's book, is an economic benefit to Avoyelles and Rapides parishes. Visitors are interested in seeing real places, real people and real stories. Louisiana is full of stories -- both tragic and triumphant. The Northup story is one of those stories.
- Movies make a huge impact on communities. A study in 2018 showed that \$1.3 billion in tourism revenue may be attributable to productions filmed and set in Louisiana, and 68% of recent visitors to Louisiana had seen productions filmed and set in Louisiana. The Northup Trail boosted visitation in Central Louisiana with 34% of the survey respondents saying the movie, "Twelve Years a Slave" influenced their decision to visit Louisiana.
- In 2016, Avoyelles Parish, population was 42,000, and the parish generated nearly \$9 million in tourism spending and over a million dollars in state and local taxes.
- That same year, Rapides Parish, population was 132,000 and they hosted more than 1 million visitors, generating \$100 million in visitor spending. The economic impact of tourism in Rapides Parish was \$23.6 million.

