

The Freedom Seeker

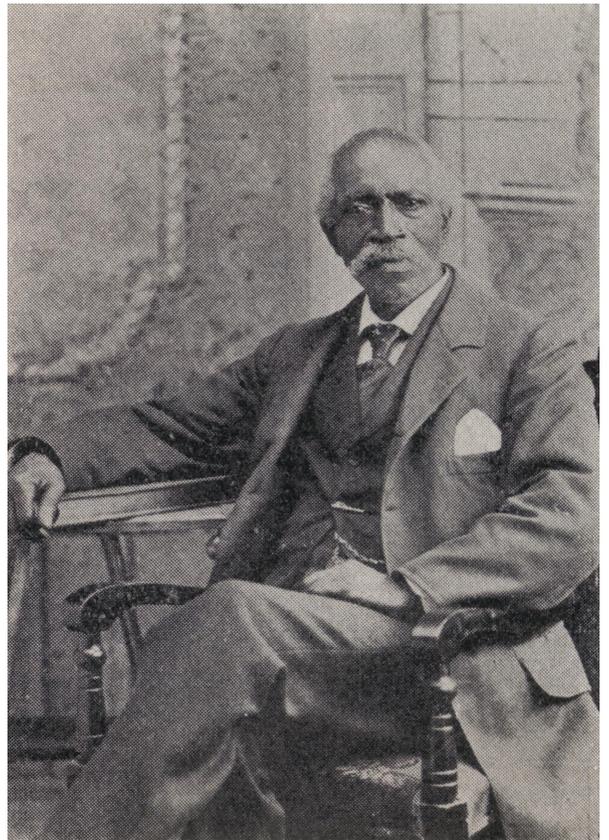
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Fall 2007

Elkins: Early African American Doctor

One of the intriguing African American figures of the 19th century in Albany is Dr. Thomas Elkins. While there is much that is not known about him, one can see from his portrait picture preserved by William Henry Johnson in *The Autobiography of William Henry Johnson*, published in 1900, he was truly a person of character and integrity. He is a special figure in the story of Albany's African American community.

William Henry Johnson identifies Elkins as one of a core of people that helped Stephen Myers in the local efforts of the Underground Railroad. This group assisted thousands of people fleeing slavery as they passed through the Albany community. In fact, Thomas Elkins is one of the people identified on the Vigilance Committee flier of 1856 that tells so much about local Underground Railroad operations. Through City Directories Elkins is identified as having lived in the mid-1850s just a few doors down from the Myers' household on Lumber Street, today's Livingston Avenue. One can imagine that, as a person with medical knowledge, he often offered his services to freedom seekers fleeing enslavement when they came through Albany and were in need of medical attention.



Coming Events

Annual Conference —
February 2008 see p. 2

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Thomas Elkins is identified in some of the City Directories of the 1840s as an Apothecary. In Johnson's book he is identified as a doctor by the Civil War period. In the early 19th century people who took on the title of "doctor" did not always receive medical training as is done today. They often interned with other physicians and took examinations to reach that title. We do not

know what route Elkins took for his station. Perhaps he interned with James McCune Smith, the noted African American doctor of the period from New York City. Perhaps he interned with Dr. Jonathan Eights, a white physician of the period who was known as a man of letters and of progressive leanings. This remains a subject for research.

Johnson notes that during the Civil War Elkins was appointed by Governor Andrews of Massachusetts as medical

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The Freedom Seeker is a publication of the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc., a non-profit corporation dedicated to promoting knowledge and understanding of the 19th-century Underground Railroad Movement in the Capital Region, in New York State, and in the United States. This newsletter is published four times a year. Editorial inquiries can be sent to URHPCR, P.O. Box 10851, Albany NY 12201. Email at info@ugrworkshop.com

2008 UGR History Conference

How It Worked: Two Centuries of Resistance, Escape, and the Underground Railroad in New York and Across the Continent is scheduled for February 22, 23 & 24. Dr. Spencer Crew, director of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, will be Friday evening's guest speaker. Saturday workshops include a rich selection of topics along with a new Student Track that features offerings planned by youth for youth. Kim and Reggie Harris and Nzinga's Daughters will perform Saturday evening. Sunday includes a celebration of solidarity with the Freedom Seekers and an interpretive tour in Arbor Hill of UGR activities as described in correspondence of the Myers. More details to come at www.ugrworkshop.com.

Myers Residence Update

Progress on the Myers Residence restoration has happened through the recent bidding for work on a basement bearing wall. The number of bidders was too few and proposed costs were too high. Building Committee members are going out to bid again in the next weeks. Once the bearing wall is stabilized further restoration work can proceed on the building's exterior.

Thomas Elkins: Activist, Inventor

(Continued from page 1)

examiner in the 54th and 55th Regiments of the Massachusetts Infantry. These regiments were the units celebrated in the movie *Glory* that told of the enlisted black soldiers' struggle for acceptance and the units assault on the Confederates at Fort Wagner.

Johnson also writes, although briefly, about Elkins overseas trip to Liberia and his having brought home a substantial collection of minerals, shells, and curiosities. Where are these artifacts now?

Elkins' gravestone at Albany Rural Cemetery identifies his birth and death as 1819 to 1900. So he lived to be approximately 81 years of age. Albany Rural Cemetery records further elaborate his date of death as August 10, 1900 and note his age as 82 at the time of death. His last residence is noted at

888 Broadway in Albany.

It is interesting to note that Elkins also spent some time as an inventor. He obtained two patents in his lifetime. One was held for an improved chamber commode patented January 9, 1872 and another was held for a refrigeration unit to be used for cadavers with a patent date of November 4, 1879.

There is much to be learned about Thomas Elkins. In his eighty-two years he became a distinguished medical professional and inventor. Along the way he participated in two very important chapters in the struggle for African American rights through participation in the Underground Railroad and the Civil War. Finally, as a man who gave greatly of himself for his community, he lived the last half of the 19th century as an Albany citizen, inventor and traveler.

BECOME A MEMBER

The Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. (URHPCR) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and encouraging knowledge and understanding of the 19th-century Underground Railroad Movement in the Capital Region, in New York State, and in the United States. Among other goals, URHPCR promotes and encourages historical research and education on the Underground Railroad Movement and seeks to mark places of historic interest relating to the Underground Railroad Movement in the Capital Region.

Benefits of Membership:

- ◆ Invitation to the annual Albany Conference in February 2008.
- ◆ Subscription to *The Freedom Seeker* (published four times a year).
- ◆ Invitations to URHPCR special events
- ◆ Walking tour of Downtown Albany Underground Railroad Sites for a nominal charge.

A limited number of subsidized individual memberships is available. Please call 518.432.4432 for more information.

Check one:

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P. O. Box 10851
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News and Notes

UGR Walking Tours and Presentations: Public tours of underground railroad sites in downtown Albany will resume in April, 2008. Group tours for 10 to 20 participants are possible by special arrangement. Sixty-minute presentations to groups are also available. Call (518) 432-4432 or visit www.ugrworkshop.com for more information.



URHPCR board meetings are now held on the second Wednesday of every month, except for December and August. Meetings for the first quarter of 2008 will be held at 6pm at Interfaith Shelter on January 9, February 13, and March 12.



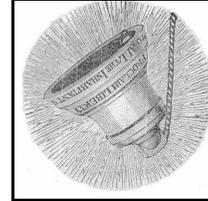
Volunteer grant writers and website editors are needed. If you're interested, please call (518) 432-4432 or visit www.ugrworkshop.com.

Inkjet and bubble-jet printer cartridges and retired cell phones are needed. URHPCR can redeem them for cash. Email or call (518) 432-4432 for details or send them to: URHPCR, Box 10851, Albany, NY 12201. Special packaging is not needed.



Welcome to new members Joan Traver, Robert Bullock, Virginia Hayes, J. M. McGrath, Virginia Bowers, Catherine Reavis, Elza Rohan Sharpe, Donna Lawrence, Sharon Calhoun, Cindy DeMarco, Catherine Stanford, Effie Bennett-Powe, Julia Holcomb, Fergus Botrdewich, Major Eddie Gurewitz, Cynthia Seacord, Jacqueline Robinson, Andor Skotnes, Barbara & Frank Traver, K. Scott Christianson, Rev. Clinton Dugger, William J. Lithgow, Peter Knechtel, Elizabeth Griffin, Robert K. Wallace, Hartgen Archaeological Associates, Anthony Opalka, Lorraine Wynne, Stan Malecki, Edward Nizalowski, Fred & Maren Stein, Muhammed Khameel Abdulai, Ronaline Saunders, Dora Lee Stanley.

*Underground Railroad History Project
of the Capital Region, Inc.*



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**UNDERGROUND RAILROAD HISTORY
PROJECT OF THE CAPITAL REGION,
INC.**

October 28th Block Clean-Up & Cook Out - Fun For All



Mrs. Walker cooks fish

A friend and Marcus Walker
wield tools



As the fall sets in members of the URHPCR Building Committee organized a block clean-up on Livingston Avenue with the Myers Residence as the focal point.

Approximately ten volunteers, many personally recruited by Ruth Ford, a member of the URHPCR Building Committee, took to the street with brooms and rakes. Some volunteers picked up papers, rubbish, bottles and cans, while others cooked food for the workers and also offered it to residents of the neighborhood.

Clean-up organizer Ruth Ford was given a framed thank you certificate for her remarkable efforts at obtaining donated food and clean-up supplies and recruiting volunteers for the event.

Stewarts, Family Dollar, M & J's Barbershop, Naz and Roz's clothing shop, Brick' Barbershop, Star Market and Jack Williams also received a special thank you for their contributions to the clean up effort.

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Please support the businesses that support UHPCR



Ms. Lynetta Davis &
friend bag refuse

Friends and Ms. Ruth
Ford

