

The Freedom Seeker

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Summer - 2013

The Underground Railroad According to Stephen Myers

Written by Paul Stewart, Scholar in Residence at Russell Sage College & Co-founder, URHPCR

When examining the letters, pamphlets, newspapers, and other documents remaining from Underground Railroad figures, many surprising revelations tell a story that is different from the commonly repeated stories about the Underground Railroad.

From among a collection of extant letters written by Stephen Myers, a letter dated December 17th, 1858 is of significant interest. Written to William John Jay, grandson of the Supreme Court Justice, Myers reveals a great deal about the workings of the Underground Railroad (UGRR) in Albany. Myers writes, "I have to collect every dollar myself and have for the last nine years. In Philadelphia and New York they have a different way of managing their business. They raise their money through anti-slavery societies and fairs. Unfortunately we have no such society here, but the members of the Republican Party have always been good to assist me. But I have to collect from this one set of men all the time and it becomes very hard on them some times." By 1858, although there was some organized effort in Albany in the form of the Vigilance Committee which provided assistance to freedom seekers, Myers makes it clear that New York City and Philadelphia had a broader funding base than the city of Albany. While larger populations and the influence of Quaker heritage may have influenced the New York City and Philadelphia situations, the presence of the seat of government in Albany may have inhibited public expression of anti-slavery sentiments.

In his December 1858 letter Myers identifies by name some of the Republican Party individuals who provide him with financial support on behalf of freedom seekers. His list includes Thurlow Weed, owner of *The Albany Evening*

Journal, and a correspondent of Frederick Douglass's. Myers is sure to thank William John Jay for the support offered by him and his family over the years, and acknowledges the many referrals of freedom seekers to the Myers home, going so far as to identify some of them by name. While men of varying financial status, these were men of influence who expressed their confidence in Myers's ability to manage their financial contributions and referrals with integrity.



Stephen Myers

Myers continues, "... this being a central point they are sent to me by Francis Jackson of Boston when they arrive in Boston. There are many that stray up here that do not come through Philadelphia or New York ... ". Thus he reveals that the traffic arriving in Albany via the Underground Railroad, while coming mainly from New York and Philadelphia, also came from Boston. As well, many other people not coming from those cities also came to Albany seeking assistance. The New York and Philadelphia references are corroborated by Douglass, who wrote that the "... fugitives were received in Philadelphia by William Still, by him sent to New York, where they were cared for by Mr. David Ruggles, and afterwards by Mr. Gibbs, ... thence to Stephen Myers at Albany; ..." (Letter of Frederick Douglass, March 27, 1893)

Further on, he writes, "Each passage to Syracuse is two dollars and fifty cents as the passage has risen. While they remain here I pay one shilling per night for lodging and 18 cents each meal. I have made it a rule when I can to send them in to the country among farmers." Here Myers notes that he places people on transportation as quickly as he can and that he pays a fare for their transportation. So it would seem that people who are leaving Albany and the Albany "station" on the way to Syracuse on the Underground Railroad are traveling as ticketed passengers on commercial transportation. Traveling as ticketed passengers contrasts dramatically with (Continued on page 4)

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Rufus King, a former governor of New York State, Mr. William Nuton, a Baptist Deacon, Governor Seward, James Wadsworth and Simon Draper. Misterns Grinnell, Minturn and Beekman are also mentioned. Horace Greeley, another named supporter, is the liberal newspaper editor of *The New*



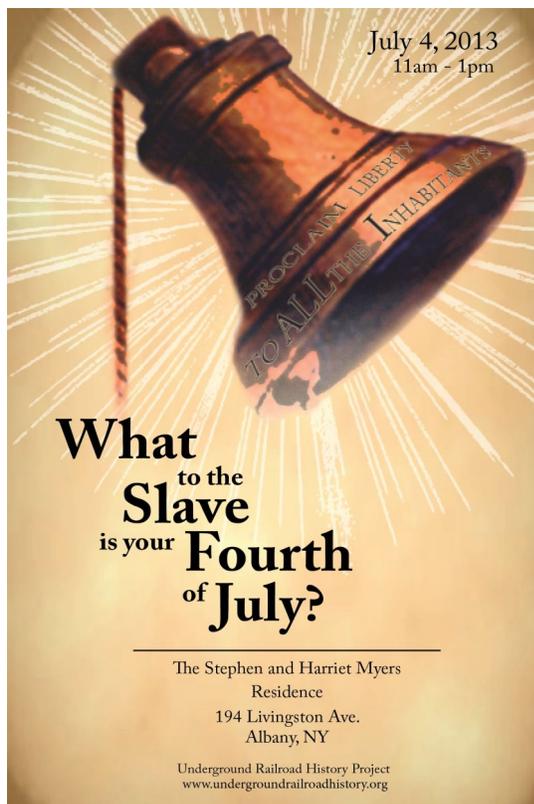
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The Freedom Seeker is a publication of Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc., a non-profit corporation dedicated to promoting knowledge of the 19th century Underground Railroad Movement and its legacy in the Capital Region, in New York State, and in the United States. This newsletter is published three times a year.

Editorial inquiries can be sent to
URHPCR, P.O. Box 10851, Albany, NY 12201.



July 4, 2013
11am - 1pm

What
to the
Slave
is your **Fourth**
of **July?**

The Stephen and Harriet Myers
Residence
194 Livingston Ave.
Albany, NY

Underground Railroad History Project
www.undergroundrailroadhistory.org

Thought provoking questions about democracy and civic engagement are as relevant today as they were in 1852 when Frederick Douglass asked his audience, "What to the Slave is your Fourth of July?"

Please bring your own chair
11-12pm - program
12-1pm - refreshments & conversation

How does your garden grow? - Reclaiming and Retelling History Through The Abram Johnson Garden — by Sandy Salerno



April 2013

The Abram Johnson Garden grew out of URHPCR's Summer 2012 Teen Program. Teens proposed turning the vacant site of the former Abram Johnson home into a garden to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood, to teach

about abolitionist history, and to educate neighbors and visitors about historic plants that would have been used for nutritional, medicinal and decorative purposes when the Johnsons and Myers lived in the neighborhood.

Sustaining the work begun by the teens, a dedicated and energetic group of volunteers continues to bring the garden to life. The Abram Johnson Garden currently provides a walking path to allow neighbors to commute between residential and commercial areas. As the garden develops, volunteers of all ages will continue to introduce heirloom plants with signage, conduct educational programs, present concerts, lectures and other events promoting the mission of the URHPCR, nurture pride in the history and heritage of the area, and provide a venue for

family celebrations and neighborhood gatherings.

The Gardening & Landscaping Committee of URHPCR, a multi-generational group of volunteers with varied backgrounds, interests, and skills, meets twice a month to develop garden plans with the help of four volunteer Master Gardeners trained by Cornell Cooperative Extension. St. Anne's Institute in Albany allows us to use their Greenhouse. Future plans include creating "Harriet's Kitchen," named for Johnson's daughter. This project will use garden products for food preparation demonstrations, hosting of 19th century meals, and sale of products produced from the garden. These products will reflect what Harriet likely used when preparing meals for her family and for freedom seekers who sought her help. The Committee coordinates "work days" during the spring, summer, and fall, when groups gather to weed, rake, plant, and laugh together. Come join the fun!



May 2013

Over the Past Months



William Topp, a.k.a. Paul Stewart, introduces Stephen Myers to 4th graders from West Point before leading them in a Vigilance Committee meeting.

Americorp/Vista Americorp interns, under the sponsorship of Siena College, visit The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence as part of their orientation. →



Focus Group Facilitators who will work with the Young Abolitionists Teen Scholars' Institute (July 8 - August 2) pose for a photo following a planning meeting.

Students from Darrow School team up with U.K. Dig Venture Directors and archeologist Corey McQuinn to learn about archeology at The Myers Residence. →



Humor Corner



“Eight passengers, per UGRR, passed through this city during the last week [Albany, March 29, 1858], in the direction of the North Star. Why don't somebody ... call attention to this incendiary? The North Star is clearly unconstitutional; as decidedly so as the Dismal Swamp or any other device which tends to lessen the value by decreasing the security of a peculiar species of property. If the President has not the power to remove this troublesome meddler with vested rights, he should make up a cause and take it before the Supreme Court, where he would find no difficulty in obtaining a decree to “put out that light” or to remove it to a Southern point or to prevent it shining, except on cloudy nights, when it can't be seen. Either would answer the purpose. I have carefully examined the Constitution of the United States and the Resolutions of '98, and can find no warrant in either for this Northern aggression. Mr. Myers, the efficient agent of the Road, reports a remarkably prosperous business for this season, so far.” (*Circular to the Friends of Freedom*, Hough Papers, Box 100, Folder 15, item 185, New York State Library)

News and Notes

Mission Statement of URHPCR:

Underground Railroad History Project
researches and preserves the local and national history
of the anti-slavery and Underground Railroad movements,
their international connections
and their legacies to later struggles;
it engages in public education and dialogue about
these movements and their relevance to modern society.

Mark your calendars and plan to attend -

- ◆ **URHPCR Board Meetings** - 3rd Thursday of every month, 5:45 - 7:30pm at Russell Sage College, Troy
- ◆ **Conference Planning Mtg** - 1st Monday of each month, 6:00 - 7:30pm in Rm. 105, Gurley Hall at Russell Sage College, Troy
- ◆ **Building & Properties Mtg** - monthly, 5:30 - 6:30pm at The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence
- ◆ **Gardening & Landscaping Mtg** - 1st & 3rd Tuesdays, 5:30-6:30pm at The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence
- ◆ **Finance Committee Mtg** - 2nd Tuesday of each month, 5:30-6:30pm at Albany Center for Economic Success
- ◆ **URHPCR Grounds Beautification and Maintenance Work Parties** - the last Saturday of each month, June through October, from 10am-1pm

Information about these meetings and events is available at 518-432-4432 or at info@UndergroundRailroadHistory.org

Welcome and thank you to new and renewing members:

Dora Lee Stanley, Jane Meader Nye, Joan Butcher, John Wolcott, Josephine Ryan, John Coniglio, Paul Murray, Stand Malecki, Deborah Goss, William E. Suggs, Kate Storms, Joseph Lemmond, Julia Holcomb, Dorothy Willsey, Deborah Abel, Sylvia Barnard, Barbara Spring, Martha J. Bennett, Rosetta Cawley, Rose Lamorella, Charmaine Cave-Dersham, Virgia Phoenix, Virginia Hayes, Eric Johnson, Latanya Frett, Lewis Greenstein, Annette Johnson, Christine Connell, Allyn Writesel, Tara Ross, Deborah Lafond, Yvonne Divak, Sharon Calhoun, Gail H. Gordon, Larry Snavley, James Owens, Ann Roche, Steve Banbury, Marguerite Vanden Wyngaard. Your support is greatly appreciated!

Invite someone you know to become a member, or give the gift of membership - details available on the Membership Page at www.UndergroundRailroadHistory.org

Questions? Concerns? Contributions? Interested in volunteering? Contact us by calling 518-432-4432 or by visiting www.UndergroundRailroadHistory.org.

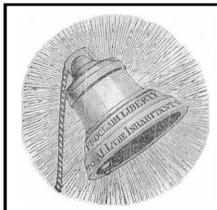
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*Underground Railroad History Project
of the Capital Region, Inc.*

ON THE WEB AT

UNDERGROUNDRAILROADHISTORY.ORG

The Underground Railroad (*cont'd from p.1*)

the commonly held images of moving from place to place in secrecy and under cover of darkness, perhaps even with a disguise. It also illustrates the public character of Underground Railroad activity. As well, Myers indicates that he sends freedom seekers out into the country among farmers if possible. While this may be a move for safety it also provides temporary work for UGRR travelers. In the early stages of the Underground Railroad in the 1820s and 1830s there are many instances identified in other sources where UGRR travelers would work their way across the country as farm laborers, general laborers and hotel workers.

While this kind of detail may seem surprising in comparison to the commonly held notions about Underground Railroad activity, it must be remembered that this letter was a private correspondence. Such privacy, as contrasted with the public venue of the weekly newspapers for which Myers wrote across his adult life, would allow Stephen Myers, when writing to a supporter such as William John Jay, to provide significant and extensive information. This December 1858 letter, while only one among many, provides a most extensive collection of details that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the working of the Underground Railroad in Albany under the leadership of Stephen Myers.

***15th Annual Solomon Northup Day
A Celebration of Freedom***



Saturday, July 20, 2013
1:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Filene Hall, Skidmore College,
Saratoga Springs, NY

**An historical & educational
community event honoring the
Ancestors**

*Learn the history, enjoy the music,
meet Solomon Northup's descendants*

Film, Food & More

Free and open to the public