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The Freedom Seeker

Spring / Summer 2010

Haiti and the Underground Railroad - Part 1

By: Andor Skotnes in collaboration with Mary Liz Stewart

On 12 January 2010, Haiti experienced a horrendous earthquake that led to unimaginable destruction, suffering, and over a quarter million deaths.

The world took notice, if briefly, and many in the United States were saddened that the Haitian people had suffered another great tragedy. Some, especially those who are White and to the Right, clicked their tongues. They bemoaned the “failure” (was it genetic? cultural?) of this Caribbean people to lift themselves out of the penury and ignorance that had once again amplified their suffering. Others in the US, more knowledgeable of the nature of poverty, racism, and the legacy of slavery in the Americas, were angered that, despite the significant outpouring of aid from governmental and private sources, and despite the fleeting news coverage, little was likely to change for this beleaguered people.

We in the Underground Railroad history movement are undoubtedly among the latter group, and that’s good. But what’s not so good is that we, like many others in the US and around the world, suffer from an imposed historical amnesia about Haiti.

The Haitian people have never been just victims. They have always been protagonists as well. Their creation of themselves as a nation, out of the most profitable and vicious European slave colony of the Americas, was in fact a world-historical act that utterly transformed everything. The Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804 was the only entirely successful, large-scale slave revolution known to history. It was, in addition,



Toussaint-L'Ouverture



Jean Jacques Dessalines

the second revolutionary breach of the European colonial system that had dominated the Americas for three long centuries, since the time of Columbus - and it was far more profoundly radical than the first, the American Revolution. Twenty years after Haitians created a society of free people, this colonial system had almost completely collapsed.

The Haitian revolution developed in contradictory symbiosis with another great modern revolution, that of its colonial master, France. Haiti was inspired by, and in turn radicalized the French insurgency. But when the French Revolution collapsed into reaction, and Napoleon tried to re-enslave the Haitians, they responded by destroying his 12,000 strong invasion force, handing him a greater defeat than that at Waterloo. Subsequently, revolutionary Haiti was a key factor in the abolition of the international slave trade in 1807-08, in shaping the abolitionist character of most of the early 19th century independence struggles in Latin America, and in so much more.

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10th Annual UGR History Conference

Workshop Proposals Requested

**Abolishing Slavery in the Atlantic World:
the 'Underground Railroad' in the
Americas, Africa, and Europe**



April 8 -10, 2011 at Russell Sage College, Troy, New York

Where there was slavery, there was resistance, escape, and rebellion. The Transatlantic Slave Trade (1400s to 1800s) was a global enterprise that transformed the four continents bordering the Atlantic, and that engendered the formation of a multifaceted and international Underground Railroad resistance movement.

The broad geographic nature of this freedom struggle is the theme of the 2011 UGR Public History Conference. We invite proposals that address capture, enslavement, and resistance within and across borders in Africa, Europe, and the Americas, historically and contemporarily, as well as proposals that address the preservation of the voices of the past and their relationship with us today.

Proposal submissions due by June 30, 2010

Details at www.ugrworkshop.com or call 518-432-4432

Save the Dates - - - - - Mark Your Calendars

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, New York 12201. Email at info@ugrworkshop.com.

Gender, Class, Race and Ethnicity in Abolitionism, on the Underground Railroad, and in the Struggle Since 2010 Conference Update

New York Council for the Humanities awarded URHPCR a generous grant in support of its work to connect New York's residents with the humanities through the 9th annual UGR Public History Conference. The 2010 Conference, *Gender, Class, Race and Ethnicity in Abolitionism, on the Underground Railroad, and in the Struggle Since*, was attended by 400 people across the three days of programming! It was a rich, educational experience drawing together a diverse, multiage audience with a variety of interests.

Evaluations repeatedly rated the conference as excellent, while offering many suggestions for improvements that will inform decisions related to the 2011 conference. Thank you to all who provided feedback.

In addition to the New York Council for the Humanities, we would like to publicly thank the conference donors who helped make the conference possible: Charles Touhey, Sage Colleges, Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, Arts Center of the Capital Region, NYSUT, M&T Bank, WMHT, Brighter Choice Foundation, Albany County Historical Association, Christina Cummings, Rensselaer County

Executive Kathleen Jimino, Family Planning Advocates of NYS, Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Historical New York Research Associates, and the Versatile Club. The advertisers who came forward to support the conference are warmly thanked as well. They will be identified in the autumn newsletter.



Our raffle prize donors deserve a round of applause. They were Amtrak, Aqua Ducks, Center for Natural Wellness, Cheesecake Factory, Friends of URHPCR, JMW Travel, Mabee Farm Historic Site, Palace Theater, Proctors, and Schenectady County Historical Society.

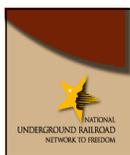
2010 Conference Auction winners include Tom Ellis, Brenda Cave-James, Maren Stein, Evarist Nicholas, Jeremy Marshall, J.R. Holcomb, Roger Green, Jim Boles, Barb Dalton, and Fredda Peritz.

2010 Conference Raffle Prize winners include Peter Desmond, Melissa Danielson, Leslie Reinherz, Susan and Fidel Mareno, Susan Spang, Kenyatta Currie, Yvette Alfonso, and Sandy and Mario Salerno.

Congratulations to all!

Over the Past Months

Welcome to **John Battin**, new Board member and Treasurer for URHPCR. John comes to the Board with a background in banking and finance. In addition, he has a rich and extensive experience with fundraising for community non-profit organizations. We look forward to John's expertise enriching the development of URHPCR as it moves from an all-volunteer organization to one that is able to support a full complement of staff and more extensive programming.



The **National Park Service Network to Freedom Program** has accepted the annual URHPCR Underground Railroad Public History Conferences into its network. The purpose of the Network to Freedom is to commemorate, preserve and interpret the historical significance of the Underground Railroad. The Network to Freedom recognizes sites, programs and facilities that have a verifiable connection with the Underground Railroad movement. This opens up possibilities for expanding the outreach efforts and funding opportunities for the annual conference. We are honored to be a part of the National Park Service Network to Freedom.

An **Environmental Protection Fund** matching grant totaling \$350,000 has been awarded to URHPCR for restoration of the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence! The scope of work covered by this grant includes repair of exterior walls, windows, roof, gutters, doors, stairs, as well as hazardous and historic materials testing, and the implementation of the second phase of an archeological study of the property.



Archeology Camp will be held this summer at the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence, 194 Livingston Avenue, Albany. The Myers Residence was the home of African American abolitionists Stephen and Harriet Myers in the mid-1850's and the office of the Albany Vigilance Committee. The Myers are credited with maintaining the best run UGR station in all of New York (David Ruggles, 1844). The one-week summer camp scheduled for July 12-16 will run from 9am-3pm daily. Designed for youth in 5th and 6th grades, it provides hands-on archeological experience that is both educational and fun. Learn about archeological tools, excavation, artifact identification, and artifact preservation. Call the Ten Broeck Mansion at 518-436-9682 for details.

News and Notes

Donations to Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. are gladly accepted online on the homepage of www.ugrworkshop.com or through postal mail to URHPCR, P.O. Box 10851, Albany, New York 12201.

Welcome and thank you to new and renewing members, Peter Knechtel, Karen K. Deeter, Carol V. Lewis, Mary E. Jones, Sylvia Barnard, Garland Nelson of Soul Session Edu-tainment, Casandra Sparks, Cindy DeMarco, Dahlia Herring, John Inman, Oscar McLaughlin, Barbara H. Counterman, Jill M. McGrath, Roger O. Green, Julie Finch, Deborah M. LaFond, Terry Willie, Lori Solomon Duell, and Michael O'Brien, Sharon Calhoun, Ellen Chernoff, and Mark Platt. Your support is greatly appreciated. *Thank you!*

Volunteers needed for work of URHPCR. Can you contribute time to the Jazz Event Committee, the Conference Committee, the Finance Committee, or the Property Committee? Do you like to organize files or books? Do you like to maintain databases? Would you like to assist with fundraising? Join us in achieving the mission of URHPCR by volunteering your time and talents.

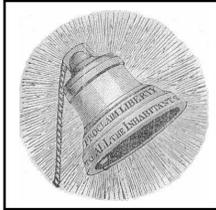
Mark your calendars for these upcoming events -

- ◆ **URHPCR Board Meetings** - the 2nd Wednesday of every month, 6-7:30pm at Sage College, Troy - Gurley Hall - Rm.105
- ◆ **Property Committee meetings** - Time and location information available by calling 518-432-4432
- ◆ **Conference Planning Meetings** - the 1st Monday of each month, 6-8pm at Sage College, Troy - Gurley Hall - Rm.105
- ◆ **Jazz Event Planning Committee** - Time and location information available by calling 518-432-4432
- ◆ **Harriet Tubman UGR Conference "Discovering More Pieces of the Puzzle"** - Chesapeake College, Cambridge Branch, Cambridge, Maryland - 6/3-6/6. Info at www.tubmanugrr.net.
- ◆ **A 4th of July Oration** - Saturday, July 3 - 11am - 1pm at the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence located at 194 Livingston Avenue, Albany, NY. Details available at www.ugrworkshop.com or at 518-432-4432.
- ◆ **Myers Residence Work Parties** - June 12, July 10, August 7, September 11, October 9 from 9am - 1pm at 194 Livingston Avenue, Albany, NY. Tools and gloves provided or bring your own. Light refreshments served.
- ◆ **Archeology Summer Camp** - July 12-16 at the Myers Residence. Call Ten Broeck Mansion for details - 518-436-9826.

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

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

ON THE WEB AT
WWW.UGRWORKSHOP.COM

Haiti and the UGR - Part 1 *(cont'd from p.1)*

My point here is that, as we contemplate Haiti in the modern world, we need to remember the Haitian Revolution. And as we research and educate around the Underground Railroad and abolitionism in the US, we need to remember the Haitian Revolution. After all, revolutionaries and abolitionists like Denmark Vesey, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, Stephen and Harriet Myers, and members of New York's Vigilance Committees all remembered and were inspired by the Haitian Revolution. We who study and celebrate these heroic figures should too.

Indeed, it is important to understand the international struggles against slavery, like those in Haiti, in order to better understand the struggles in the US. This is a major goal of the 10th annual Underground Railroad History Conference in April 2011. *Abolishing Slavery in the Atlantic World: the 'Underground Railroad' in the Americas, Africa, and Europe* will focus on how the Transatlantic slave trade gave rise to an international resistance movement that influenced and was influenced by developments in the United States.

But I have, in this article, left a gap. I started above with the recent, devastating earthquake in Haiti, then refocused on the Haitian Revolution of 200 years ago. What is the legacy of that revolution over the last two centuries for Haitians, for the world, and for us today? What does it have to do with the earthquake and how we respond to it? All of this will be addressed in Part 2 in the next newsletter.

*Andor Skotnes, The Sage Colleges, Troy, New York, URHPCR Board
and Program Committee Member, and
Mary Liz Stewart, co-founder and co-director of URHPCR, Inc.*

Toussaint-L'Ouverture (May 20, 1743 – April 7, 1803) was the leader of the Haitian Revolution. Born in Saint Domingue, Toussaint led enslaved blacks in a long struggle for independence over French colonizers, abolished slavery, invaded Santo Domingo to free the slaves there and secured "native" control over the colony, Haiti.

Honored as one of the founding fathers of Haiti, **Jean-Jacques Dessalines** was second in command under Toussaint L'Ouverture during the Haitian Revolution and was the general who emerged after L'Ouverture's capture to lead the Haitians in declaring Haitian independence on January 1, 1804.