

The Freedom Seeker

Volume 1, Issue 1

Winter 2003-2004

Coming Events

- **February 28:** Annual Conference "Underground Railroad: Quests for Freedom," College of St. Rose, 8:30am to 5pm (see story on page 4)
- **January 4:** General Membership Meeting (HVCC - 175 Central Avenue, Albany - 5:30 PM)
- **January and February:** Educational programs throughout the area (see News and Notes)

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The Underground Railroad in the Capital District

Paul Stewart, URHPCR President

Albany was a busy port city throughout the nineteenth century. During its most active Underground Railroad days, the city was occupied by lumber and other businesses at the riverfront and numerous retail establishments along Market Street (our current Broadway), Pearl Street, and corresponding cross streets. Although it was the state capital (since 1797) Albany truly began to expand only after the completion in 1825 of the Erie Canal, which enhanced the city as a destination for riverboat shipping and traffic.

Commerce along the Hudson and Erie Canal system, and new forms of transportation such as the steamboat and the railroad, greatly increased the opportunities for people, including fugitives from slavery, to travel from port to port, and city to city. The new transportation systems, as well as burgeoning social movements of the antebellum period, such as Sunday School, temperance and women's rights movements, provided abundant opportunities for the sort of networking that facilitated Underground Railroad efforts.

And the Underground Railroad was just that: a network of people providing assistance to fugitives from slavery in the early and mid 19th century prior to the Civil War (1861-1865). These fugitives were assisted by free blacks, whites, church people, political abolitionists, men and women, and they traveled to freedom by any means available. When traveling through New York State to Canada, fugitives often passed through Albany to Buffalo (and then on to Canada), while others chose an eastern route into Vermont and along the Champlain Canal.



Stephen Myers, leader of Underground Railroad in Albany (1830s-50s) (courtesy of Albany Public Library, Picture from Autobiography of William Henry Johnson, 1900)

Supporters of slavery, meanwhile, regarded it as a moral and economic necessity to maintain the slave economy. Opposition to this brutal system of human bondage took many forms: some people worked within the political system, some people took up arms, some people chose writing, others chose civil

(Continued on page 2)



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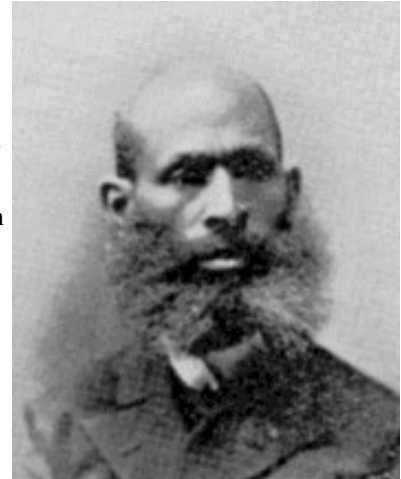
The Freedom Seeker is a publication of the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc., a non-profit corporation dedicated to promoting and encouraging knowledge and understanding of the 19th-century Underground Railroad Movement in the Capital Region, in New York State, and in the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

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disobedience through assisting fugitives. Even though slavery was abolished in New York State in 1827, the Federal Fugitive Slave Laws of 1793 and 1850 continued slavery's legal presence in the free states of the north, obliging those states to honor the rights of southern plantation masters to own people as "chattel" property.

Over the 30 years prior to the Civil War many people in the Capital Region chose to disobey federal statutes by assisting fugitives from slavery. Those who aided "freedom seekers" included journalist Stephen Myers, local leader of the movement, who over two decades helped thousands pass through the region in their escape from slavery, William Henry Johnson, a tireless abolitionist who moved to the area in 1851, and the Mott sisters, Abigail and Lydia, members of the local Quaker community.

Few, if any, buildings used by abolitionists and freedom seekers exist in Albany due to fires and urban development, so it is difficult to visualize their activities in the built environment of our city. Telling their stories and preserving their presence in our historical landscape is the mission of the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, a non-profit educational organization dedicated to preserving the historical record of the UGRR in our city and our region.



William Henry Johnson, local abolitionist and UGRR activist. Picture courtesy Albany Public Library from Autobiography of William Henry Johnson, 1900

An Evening of Jazz

Jazz Benefit Helps Underground Railroad Project

Paul Stewart, *URHPCR President*

"An Evening of Jazz", an exciting and memorable benefit program, took place Sunday, October 26, 2003 from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Clubb Matrixx at 942 Broadway in Albany. The program was a benefit for the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc., a not-for-profit organization chartered by the Regents of the State of New York.

Over 100 people attended this memorable evening program of entertainment that featured the John Hilton Trio, a well known jazz band, and an original musical cabaret, "From Field Holler to Motown Groove", written and performed by Madlyn Young with Edgar Mullins.



Madlyn Young and Edgar Mullins perform a cabaret of songs

Stories of local Underground Railroad activists and local freedom seekers were displayed. New friendships were made, old friendships renewed and all in attendance had a wonderful time. The spirit of the evening caused one person to ask,

"When will you do this again?" We hope to. The event raised funds to cover insurance and non-profit incorporation fees needed for the survival of the URHPCR. Organizations like the URHPCR depend on public support, in the form of donations and memberships.

In the future the URHPCR will be raising funds for annual budgets as well as for the purchase of documents and artifacts of local Underground Railroad activities. Let us know if you have something to give.

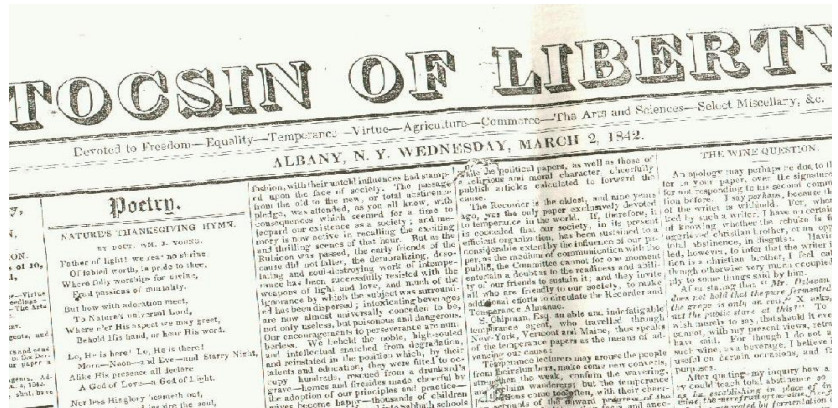
News and Notes

Paul and Mary Liz Stewart, the founders of URHPCR and tireless activists when it comes to educating the public about the Underground Railroad, regularly make presentations throughout the region. The presentations last about one hour with a question and answer period afterward. Armed with Power Point, Paul and Mary Liz take their audiences through the historic struggles against slavery in the Capital Region. Over the next couple of months, they will be at the following locations:

- ◆ January 9 - Albany Civic Theater, Albany - 7pm
- ◆ January 11 - Albany Civic Theater, Albany - 3pm (family program)
- ◆ January 15 - State of New York Division of Military and Naval Affairs, Latham - 3:30pm

- ◆ February 10 - Howe Public Library, Albany - 6pm (family program)
- ◆ February 19 - Hamilton Hill Arts Center, Schenectady - 10am (family program)

- ◆ February 28 - Underground Railroad: Quests for Freedom Conference - College of St. Rose, Albany - 8:30 am to 5:00 pm



The *Tocsin of Liberty*—Albany Abolition newspaper in the early 1840s

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 Charter Membership:

- ◆ Invitation to the annual Albany Conference in February 2004.
- ◆ Subscription to *The Freedom Seeker* (published three times a year).
- ◆ Invitations to URHPCR special events
- ◆ Walking tour of Downtown Albany Underground Railroad Sites for a nominal charge.
- ◆ Calendar of local, state, and national events on the Underground Railroad Movement

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

Check one:

- Individual \$25
- Family 37.50
- Contributing 50
- Sustaining 75
- Student 12.50
- Institutional 25
- Corporate 100

Name _____

Address _____

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Please make your check payable to **URHPCR**
Send with this form to the address below

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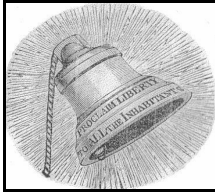
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Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc.

ON THE WEB AT
WWW.UGRWORKSHOP.COM

Don't Miss the February Conference

To highlight the Underground Railroad's colorful and exciting part in our national and local history, the URHPCR sponsors an annual conference. This year's gathering, "The Underground Railroad: Quest for Freedom," will take place on February 28, 2004 at the College of Saint Rose in Albany.

Dr. Risa Fausette, assistant professor of history and political science at the College of Saint Rose, will deliver the keynote address on "African American Freedom Seekers and the Quest for Liberty." Fausette teaches courses on the abolitionist period and the Underground Railroad, and has spoken frequently on the subject.

Workshops will include: "Crossing To The Other Side" (a historical reading); America's Greatest Slave Rescue: The Charles Nalle Story; Freedom Seeking Activities in Peterboro in the 19th Century; The Odyssey of Moses Viney: A Capital Region Story; Art, History and

Social Memory: Using Public Art To Connect With Underground Railroad History; African American Resistance in Antebellum Fiction. We will also be running Educator Workshops. The program will feature theater, art, abolition music, and a litany remembering some of the fugitives we know passed through the Capital Region.



Professor Risa Fausette at URHPCR's 2003 conference

Advance conference registration is \$25. The price includes a continental breakfast and lunch. Student, senior and family rates are also available. Registration materials may be obtained by calling 518-432-4432 and leaving your name and address, or on-line at www.ugrworkshop.com.

For additional Information & Registration Contact: The Underground Railroad History Project - Box 10851 - Albany, NY 12201 - 518-432-4432. Email: conference@ugrworkshop.com