

# The Freedom Seeker

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## *Burial Discoveries At Schuyler Flatts in Menands*

Hidden in an unlikely location in a grassy area at the entrance to the Federal Express facility along Route 32 in Colonie, the Schuyler Flatts Burial Ground is a singularly important record of African American history. Unearthed during sewer construction in 2005, the unmarked burial ground had not been used in nearly 200 years and was unknown on maps and other historical documents. State historic officials have mapped all known historic burial sites. This one was unknown. Archaeologists from Hartgen Archaeological Associates, Inc. excavated the graves that were in the path of construction and bioarchaeologists from the New York State Museum helped to learn their identity.

Studies of the human remains identified several individuals of African ancestry. Hand wrought iron nails and small pins that were probably used to fasten burial shrouds date the graves to the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. Historical records indicate the majority of Africans living at the Flatts during this time were enslaved by wealthy

landowners like the prominent Schuyler family who owned the property where the burial ground was located.

The bones of the Schuyler Flatts people bear witness to their lives and the realities of enslavement in colonial Albany. Six women and one man showed signs of hard work with heavy muscle



Excavations by Hartgen Archaeological Associates, Inc. at the Schuyler Flatts Burial Ground.

development and widespread osteoarthritis even in their hands and feet. They suffered from very poor dental health and the presence of five infants and two children is a poignant reminder of the fragility of life, particularly under slavery. The Schuyler Flatts people have much to tell about life before emancipation. Once the studies are completed and their stories are told, they will be reburied at Albany Rural Cemetery. A suitable marker will be provided and the broader community will be invited to help provide a fitting burial.

A specialist in facial reconstruction for the New York State Museum, Gay Malin, has examined the remains and created models which tell us something of what the Schuyler Flatts people looked like. One reconstruction is of a

*(Continued on page 4)*

### **Coming Events**

**Walking Tours starting on May 11**  
Mothers Day - 1-3 pm  
Bring Mom for half price

Invite URHPCR to speak at your event - call 518-432-4432 or email info@ugrworkshop.com

### **Inside this issue**

2008 Conference	2
News and Notes	3



## URHPCR Board of Directors

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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 four times a year. Editorial inquiries can be sent to URHPCR, P.O. Box 10851, Albany, New York 12201. Email at [info@ugrworkshop.com](mailto:info@ugrworkshop.com)

## Annual Meeting News

At the 2008 Annual Meeting of URHPCR held February 24th during URHPCR's annual conference, new officers were elected in keeping with the goals set forth in the strategic plan developed in 2007. Elected to the Presidency is Ahimsa Teabout. The vice president position is filled by Annette Johnson. The position of Secretary is filled by Tony Opalka. The treasurer position is filled by Ron Gardner. All of the officers are enthusiastic and ready to fulfill their roles. Many thanks go to past officers Paul Stewart, Andrew Feffer, and Benita Law-Diao who shepherded URHPCR through its first years.

### Special Thanks

**Thank you to all** of the donors and advertisers for the 2008 Conference.

**Thank you to M & T Bank** for its generous contribution to support *The Freedom Seeker*, the 2008 UGR Public History Conference, and restoration work on the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence.

**Thanks to Albany County** for their transfer of 99 Third Street and 196 Livingston Avenue to URHPCR for incorporation into its developing UGR Campus.

**Thanks to Upstate History Alliance and Heritage New York** for their grants to help with implementation of a capital campaign for our restoration project needs.

## "How It Worked": 2008 UGR Public History Conference

On February 22-24 more than 250 people gathered at the College of Saint Rose in Albany for an information and entertainment filled weekend focusing on the Underground Railroad.

"Underground Railroad - How It Worked: Two Centuries of Resistance, Escape and the UGR in New York and Across the Continent" commenced with a buffet reception at the Best Western Sovereign Hotel in Albany where Dr. Spencer Crew spoke about the Underground Railroad, education and the Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati.

On Saturday Mary Kay Ricks, an attorney and researcher from Washington, D.C., was scheduled to give the keynote address. She was unable to join us because of flight cancellations due to inclement weather. Instead a quickly convened panel of experts consisting of Judy Wellman, Fergus Bordewich, John Gartrell and Norman Dann shared observations on what we can know about the Underground Railroad from fresh research being done today. The panel was outstanding as they addressed the diversity of new insights that today inform the interpretation of this more than a century and a half old subject.

Workshops during the day included presentations by scholars, re-enactors, musicians, authors, youth, and independent researchers. Many ways of examining the Underground Railroad story brought this history and its legacy forward in new and exciting ways. Saturday evening included a concert with Kim and Reggie Harris, nationally known folk musicians, and Nzinga's Daughters, an a cappella singing group from Connecticut.

Sunday morning included a "celebration of solidarity" where readings from the Underground Railroad period were combined with a litany remembering both abolitionists and freedom seekers. This was followed by a walking tour in Arbor Hill in Albany where letters from Stephen and Harriet Myers became the focus of discussion at each tour stop.

The day concluded with a bus trip to the W.E.B. DuBois celebration held at Clinton AME Zion Church in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. This celebration marked the 140th anniversary of the activist's birth in Great Barrington.

A great weekend was had by all.



## BECOME A MEMBER

The Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. (URHPCR) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting knowledge and understanding of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Underground Railroad Movement and its legacy 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
- ◆ Subscription to *The Freedom Seeker*, published four times a year
- ◆ Invitations to URHPCR special events
- ◆ Walking tours of Capital District Underground Railroad Sites at a reduced rate
- ◆ Announcements 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.

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## News and Notes

On Sunday, November 11, 2007 URHPCR held its annual jazz fundraising event at The Clarion Hotel in Albany, NY. Local jazz greats Sonny and Perley, along with Tommy Ford, Charlie Tokarz and Mike Demarco, collectively known as Bossambajazz, played to packed house.

Bossambajazz is known for playing a wonderful mixture of Latin, traditional jazz and R & B tunes. From the time the doors opened at 4 p.m. until the last notes sounded at 8 p.m. almost no one left! R & B vocalist, Garland Nelson, an area favorite, dropped by and sang a number of duets with Perley Russo, and brought down the house, as they did at last year's event, with their frolic through musical time. Later in the evening, Perley graciously took requests from the audience. While friends, family and supporters of URHPCR were listening to the sophisticated sounds of the band and munching on hor d'oeuvres, an

enthusiastic silent auction was taking place in a side café. Items for the auction were donated by area businesses including: The Pottery Place, Silver Parrott, Ten Thousand Villages, The Bookhouse of Stuyvesant Plaza, Stagecoach Coffee, and 74 State in Albany. Proceeds from the annual jazz event and the silent auction go toward the work of Underground Railroad History Project.

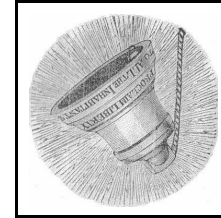
There were approximately 150 people at the Fall 2007 event including two youth ambassadors. They stopped by on their way to another program and ended up staying! Also in attendance were members of Black Dimensions in Art, Minorities in Criminal Justice, and Albany District Links. Discussions are already underway for next year's event!



Garland Nelson

ON THE WEB AT  
WWW.UGRWORKSHOP.COM

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UNDERGROUND RAILROAD  
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## *Schuyler Flatts Burial Ground*

*(cont'd from p.1)*

30-35 year old woman. The facial reconstructions are done in clay and provide a realistic image of what some of the people might have looked like.

Results from the bioarchaeological examination of the remains have been made public through papers offered at area conferences such as the Underground Railroad History Project Conference in 2007, through poster displays and discussions, and through a presentation held in 2006 at Russell Sage College in Troy where a workshop detailed the discovery and experts spoke on the interpretation of the discoveries. Papers have also been given at the 2006 Northeast Anthropological Association meeting.

The story of these remains is an important part of the region's history and deserves wider exposure.



**Above:** Facial reconstruction of a 30-35 year old woman from the Schuyler Flatts Burial Ground. Facial reconstruction by Gay Malin of the New York State Museum (clay sculpture only, this is not the final version with coloring or hair).