

Volume VI, No. 3

The Freedom Seeker

Autumn 2009

The Seminole UGR - Part 2

By: Andor Skotnes

In the last *Freedom Seeker*, I sketched the history of the Seminoles, a people of mixed African and Indigenous descent, during the century after their beginnings in the mid-1700s. Over this period, the Seminoles embraced thousands of fugitives escaping from slavery across the Florida border, and they ferociously defended the multiethnic society that resulted against prolonged armed assault from the Slavocracy to the north. In the early 1840s, the majority of the war-weary Seminoles agreed to move to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi, but only if the Black Seminoles remained among them and were not re-enslaved by the US. This heroic struggle must be seen as a crucial episode in the history of the Underground Railroad. However, the struggle didn't end there.

Seminole attempts to build a new society in what would become Oklahoma were, from the start, undermined by the forces of slavery - both white and (surprisingly) Creek Indian - who made ever-greater efforts to enslave Black Seminoles. Many of the Creeks and other southern Indian peoples had, during

became their targets. In 1848, the Polk administration joined the fray by declaring that all Black Indians in the Territory be enslaved. Most Seminoles resisted, and a large group of both Black and Indian Seminoles fled



Gopher John, a Black Seminole, was an interpreter during the second Seminole War 1835 - 1842 (Image from Florida Memory, State Library and Archives of Florida)

to the freedom of Mexico. Ultimately, attempts to enslave Black Seminoles ended with the Reconstruction-era US-Indian treaties of 1866 which required that all tribal members of African descent receive full and equal rights.

After the treaties, multiethnic Seminole society revived, but then, around the turn of the century, the combined force of US-Indian policy and Jim Crow struck. The US government attacked the communal property relations of Seminoles and other peoples, appropriated large portions of Indian land, and

(Continued on page 4)

Inside this issue

<i>The Sage Colleges</i>	2
<i>2010 UGR Public History Conference</i>	2
<i>The Myers Residence</i>	3

the early 1800s, adopted US-style slavery when they "civilized," and they continued this practice in the West. The Black Seminoles therefore



URHPCR Board of Directors

Paul Stewart, Co-Founder
with **Mary Liz Stewart**

Colwyn Allen

Pat Barrot

Robert Bullock

Al DeSalvo, President

Ron Gardner, Treasurer

Kathleen Godfrey

John Inman

Annette Johnson, Vice-President

Vera Michelson

Anthony Opalka

Mae Saunders

Andor Skotnes

Maurice Thornton

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.

Sage & URHPCR Launch Partnership

On November 17, 2009, from 4:30-6pm, The Sage Colleges and URHPCR will formally embark on a partnership with the official opening of the URHPCR office in Gurley Hall. This collaboration is expected to see the beginning of a new set of opportunities for URHPCR and Sage. It will be a springboard for new research and programming ventures. It opens up options for grant funding that will support new educational efforts. The office will provide a formal space from which student interns and organizational volunteers will be able to contribute to the research, promotion, outreach, and maintenance of URHPCR activities.



Gurley Hall viewed from
2nd Street, Troy

This new phase in the development of URHPCR has come about through the efforts of President Susan Scrimshaw, Dean Sharon Robinson, and Professor Andor Skotnes, a URHPCR Board Member. The URHPCR Board is magnanimously thankful to President Scrimshaw, to Dean Robinson, and to Professor Skotnes for their generosity, graciousness, and willingness to support URHPCR in this manner. We look forward to many exciting educational ventures that will strengthen and expand both Sage and URHPCR as we move forward into the future.

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

Get ready! The 9th annual UGR History Conference is coming your way! February 26, 27, and 28 of 2010 Russell Sage College in Troy, New York will be the generous host of *Gender, Class, Race, and Ethnicity in Abolitionism, on the Underground Railroad, and in the Struggle Since*.



Rhonda Williams

A workshop designed just for teachers has been added to Friday's program. *The Not So Underground Underground Railroad* will be the topic of the day. Friday evening we will commence the conference weekend with a thought provoking presentation from Organization of American Historians Distinguished Lecturer Rhonda Y. Williams, Ph.D. A lively reception will close the evening.

Saturday, as always, will be full of enriching workshops, a keynote, cultural performance, and a closing choral performance, along with our wonderful vendors and poster displays. *O' Freedom*, performed by Vanessa Johnson, will bring to life the brave voices of women and children who were involved in the Civil Rights

Movement. Bring your voices and be ready to join in. The Sage Colleges President Susan Scrimshaw plans to join her voice with other vocalists in a wonderful closing chorus of freedom songs.

Continuing the tradition of holding a reception following Saturday workshops, stop in at Rensselaer County Historical Society from 5-8pm to meet Scott Christianson and Mark Priest. Christianson, renowned researcher and author, will be available for a book signing of his new book *Freeing Charles*, and Tennessee artist Mark Priest will speak about his artistic depiction of *The Rescue of Charles Nalle*.

Bus tours of Troy's African American heritage sites are planned for Sunday.

Full details are available at www.ugrworkshop.com or by calling 518-432-4432.



Bring yourself, your friends, your family to every or any part of this enriching weekend program. It's a great way to spend a weekend, celebrating and preserving history and investigating its relationship to us today!

The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence

Over the summer, commencing in June of 2009, Western Building Restorations Company, Inc., acting as the contractor for shoring and bracing, began work at the Myers Residence that represents phase one of a four phase project. One of the challenges of restoration of the Myers Residence is that the building is approximately 162 years old. Modern construction processes are not always appropriate for the work that needs to be done on the building and the building needs special handling from skilled structural engineers and building trades people who understand how older buildings are designed and function.

Many small but significant structural improvements that have happened for the building include restoration of missing outside brick mantel pieces to the front of the building, masonry repairs to sections of the northeast corner of the building and south east corner of the building; the introduction of masonry ties into the attic to hold brick work in place that was bulging, the placement of scaffold and wood column bracing throughout the building in preparation for repair of a failing wall and the rear south wall, and removal of the rear wooden porch.

These repairs have made visible changes in the building's

appearance since 2004 when Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region (URHPCR) took ownership. They represent the initial stages of phase I and II work that is expected to be completed by autumn 2010. This work has been paid for through a grant from Heritage New York, the Environmental Protection Fund, and matching funds from an assortment of donors such as 1772 Foundation, M & T Bank, and hundreds of individuals.



As we head into the colder months the building needs to be heated to keep the foundation brick temperature above freezing so as to avoid freeze/thaw cycle damage. URHPCR representatives have met with electrical contractors to bring power into the building. It is expected that this part of the work will be completed soon. Additional work will need to be done to create a building envelope sufficient to allow efficient heating of the building's critical areas.

URHPCR continues to need contributions to support this phase of the work. Donations to the restoration of the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence can be made online at www.ugrworkshop.com or by mailing to the organizational address on this newsletter. Thank you for your support.

News and Notes

Donations to Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. are gladly accepted by donating online on the homepage of www.ugrworkshop.com or by using the enclosed envelope.

Welcome and thank you to new and renewing members, Paul Rehm, Christina Cummings, Robert Emery, John Battin, Peter Sokaris, Flora Carr, Eileen Connell Kawola, J. M. McGrath, Neville Moore, Edward Nizalowski, Saundra and Harris Oberlander, Preston Pierce.

Thank you to the Albany District Links and their 2009 Community Giving Program for their generous contribution to the restoration of the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence.

Volunteers needed for work of URHPCR Committees. 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.

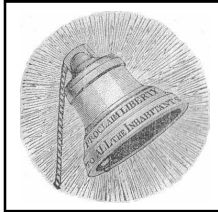
Mark your calendars for these upcoming events -

- ◆ **URHPCR Board Meetings** - the 2nd Wednesday of every month, except August and December, at 6pm at Interfaith Homeless Partnership, 176 Sheridan Avenue, Albany
- ◆ **Property Committee meetings** - the 2nd Monday of every month, at 5:30pm. Check www.ugrworkshop.com or call 518-432-4432 for location information
- ◆ **Conference Planning Meetings** - the 1st Monday of each month at 7pm. at Gurley Hall at Sage College, Troy
- ◆ **Jazz Event Planning Committee** - the 3rd Monday of each month. Please call 518-432-4432 for time and location information
- ◆ **150th Commemoration of John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry** - December 6 at the John Brown Farm State Historic Site - www.nysparks.state.ny.us/events
- ◆ **Race, Labor and Citizenship in the Post-Emancipation South** - March 11-13, 2010 at the College of Charleston, South Carolina

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

P.O. Box 10851
Albany NY 12201

Phone: 518-432-4432
Fax: 518-432-4432
Email: info@ugrworkshop.com



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

ON THE WEB AT
WWW.UGRWORKSHOP.COM

The Seminole UGR

(cont'd from p.1)

undermined tribal governments. White functionaries, using little more than their own imaginations, drew up tribal rolls that for the first time divided full tribal members from “freedmen” of lesser racial status. And the new Oklahoma State Constitution of 1907, one of the most thoroughly Jim Crow in the country, mandated strict racial segregation everywhere in the state, including on Seminole lands.

While damaged, multiethnic Seminole society survived even this, and, along with those of other Indian peoples, began to rebound in the 1970s. The US government, under intense popular pressure during these years, restored tribal autonomy and strengthened tribal governance. The economies of the nations began to improve, especially with the widespread introduction of gaming, and activists forced the US government to make some reparations

for stolen land. In 2000 the Seminoles were awarded \$56 million. However, in this context, reactionary forces among Seminoles, Cherokees, and Creeks, in evident collusion with federal officials, gained the upper hand, and moved to revoke the rights, benefits, and even the citizenship of Black Indians, justifying their actions with the segregationist tribal rolls from early in the century. When one Black Seminole protested these actions, a tribal official told her to “go back to Africa.” Black Seminoles, with their allies (which now include the Congressional Black Caucus) have fought back. They have blocked an attempt to expel them from their nation, but they have so far been unable to restore most of their rights.

The struggle that began long ago in the Spanish territory of Florida, continues.

*Andor Skotnes, Ph.D., Professor of History of the Americas,
Department of History, Law and Government,
The Sage Colleges, Troy, New York*