

Volume VII, No. 3

The Freedom Seeker

Fall / Winter 2010 - 2011

Haiti and the Underground Railroad - Part 2

By: Andor Skotnes

In the last issue of *The Freedom Seeker*, I told the story of the Great Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, the most massive and successful slave rebellion in history. I noted that, as historian Franklin Knight, a major speaker at our tenth annual UGR conference, writes, the “impact of the Haitian Revolution was both immediate and widespread.” Indeed, as historian Robin Blackburn, also a major conference speaker, puts it, the Revolution “was a huge event for the whole Atlantic world.” Enslaved people and abolitionists were inspired and mobilized everywhere, not least in the US. However the Revolution also provoked great fear among the slave masters and their allies in Western governments, not least in the US. This fear triggered a series of retaliations that shaped Haiti’s post-revolutionary history.

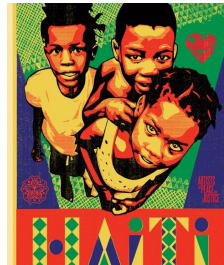
Tragically, the US - the first revolutionary, anti-colonial republic of the Americas - along with the European colonial powers, immediately retaliated with what Blackburn calls a “*cordon sanitaire*” around the second such republic. In 1826, even the newly independent republics of Latin America, including many who benefited from the example and the support of revolutionary Haiti, acquiesced to the exclusion of the “Black republic” from the first conference of hemispheric nations. International isolation magnified the post-revolutionary domestic crisis in Haiti, increasing political instability, armed violence, agricultural disruption, and poverty. When the desperate Haitian government managed to breach this isolation, it did



Jean Bertrand Aristide



Children collecting water



Haiti’s children



Haiti’s coastline

so at great cost. In the early 1820s, France agreed to recognize Haiti in exchange for payments to cover the alleged loss of French property during the Revolution. The debt thereby accrued drained immense wealth from Haiti for nearly six decades. It was paid off in 1879. In the meantime, the US continued to shun Haiti until 1862, when, after the secession of the slave states, abolitionists persuaded Lincoln to recognize the Caribbean country.

During the late 19th century, Haiti finally experienced a brief period of stability and growth. But this ended as German and US bank capital competed to control Haiti’s economy, triggering a 1915 military invasion by the US to protect its business interests. A long period of US military occupation and rule - that promoted US economic interests and Jim Crow policies - followed. After FDR pulled the troops out in 1934, the US maintained its direct control of

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

Announcing 2010 UGR Conference DVD Release

“The Underground Railroad - a loose network of lawbreakers”, as it was described by keynote speaker Rhonda Williams, PhD, at the 2010 UGR Conference "Gender, Class, Race and Ethnicity in Abolitionism, on the Underground Railroad, and in the Struggle Since", has been captured on a 55 minute DVD of conference proceedings produced by Image Quilt Productions. The key points of her presentation, along with selections from several workshops, the cultural performance, displays, the art exhibit, and the reception at the Rensselaer County Historical Society are included.



Funding for the recording and production of conference proceedings was generously provided by New York Council for the Humanities.

If you attended the conference you may want a copy to recall some of the speakers, workshops and performance. If you did not attend the conference the DVD will give you a good introduction to what took place. It could be an excellent tool for opening up conversation about the Underground Railroad in a classroom or community meeting.

Those interested in purchasing a copy of the DVD should send a check for \$18 (\$15 + \$3 S/H) to URHPCR, P.O. Box 10851, Albany, NY 12201. Please be sure that a postal mailing address is provided with your payment. The supply is limited. Order now!

Abolishing Slavery in the Atlantic World: the ‘Underground Railroad’ in the Americas, Africa and Europe

April 8 - 10, 2011 Conference Update

Come one, come all to the 10th anniversary Underground Railroad Public History Conference scheduled for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday April 8, 9, and 10 of 2011! A weekend you don't want to miss! Russell Sage College in Troy will be the generous host for this grand event.

Our **Educators' Workshop** will return with Alan Singer, PhD from Hofstra University speaking about Abolitionists and Slavery in New York and Charles Reitz, PhD, retired, from Kansas City Kansas Community College speaking about Douglass, Marx, Greeley, the German 48ers and their joint influence on anti-racist thought. Kim and Reggie Harris will open Friday evening's **Opening Lecture** by Robin Blackburn, PhD, from Essex University, England, who will speak on 'The International Struggle to End the Slave Trade and Its Ramifications Today'.

Saturday's daytime program will include a morning keynote by Franklin Knight, PhD, speaking on 'Of Slavery & Abolition: Perspectives from the World of the Slaves', and an afternoon keynote panel with Tony Burroughs, nationally famous genealogist from Chicago, MaryNell Morgan, PhD, and Miki Conn, addressing the topic of preservation in public memory. Our Student Track returns, along with the addition of a Museum/Historic Sites Track, vendors, and poster displays. Approximately thirty workshops are

scheduled, which include such topics as 'From Slave Pen to State Pen', 'Mapping African American Historic Places in the Northeast', 'The African Diaspora Among Brazilian Immigrants in the U.S.', 'Underground Railroad 101', 'Sirens of the Sea - Female Slave Ship Owners of the Atlantic World', 'Touched by Their Spirits: Students Give Voice to the Victims of the Middle Passage', 'Freedom in Canada: From Slavery to Emancipation', 'Marooned State: Hard-Won Independence in Haiti', 'Rebeldia Esclava en el Caribe', 'Resistance, Resiliency, and Continuity: the Jamaican Maroons', 'Modern Day Slavery', and much more. **Saturday's evening reception** will include an art exhibit and awards ceremony.

Sunday's cultural performance extravaganza reflecting the conference theme has an afternoon and evening component. During the afternoon the audience will be engaged by storyteller Eshu Bumpus, musicians Peter, Paul and George, the Hamilton Hill Arts Center dancers and drummers, and Garland Nelson of Soul-Session Entertainment with MaryNell Morgan. The evening's performers include Magpie, Sparky & Rhonda Rucker, and Barbara & Graham Dean.

April 8, 9, 10, 2011 - the 10th anniversary UGR Public History Conference - THE PLACE TO BE! - See you there!

Over the Past Months



Welcome to Michael Flinton, new Board member for URHPCR. Michael comes to the Board with a background in museum administration and development. He currently teaches in the Cooperstown Graduate Program, an award winning graduate museum training program. We look forward to Mike'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 2010 Jazz Event Fundraiser was an evening to remember! Bobby Sanabria and Quarteto Ache` performed a phenomenal repertoire of lively jazz that had the audience singing along! It was "a great program for a great cause" according to attendee MaryNell Morgan. The Silent Auction, buffet, and conversation made for a memorable evening. Thanks to the VanDyck for hosting!

Even when it seems as though nothing is happening there is progress being made on the restoration of the **Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence**.



The Properties Committee has been meeting regularly to map out strategies to apply the funds obtained through the state funding processes. A scope of work has been outlined for use of the grant funds remaining from Heritage New York and the Environmental Protection Fund.

Stephen Tilly Architects of Dobbs Ferry is developing a construction Master Plan, which is funded in part by a grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation (\$5,000) with matching funds raised from the community (\$7,000). The Master Plan, which will guide the construction process, is anticipated to be completed by autumn 2011.

2010 marks the first full year in which the Myers Residence has had limited heat and electric service. The goal of having electric heat in the building is to keep the foundation area free of the freeze-thaw and ice build up problems which destroy masonry areas. While electric heat can be costly, it is safer than gas in the event of any kind of problems, and vastly cheaper to install than gas heat.

The Properties Committee also continues to give attention to the grounds around the building and the associated properties owned in the neighborhood by URHPCR. New committee members are always welcome.

News and Notes

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

Thank you to M&T Bank for a \$2,500 contribution to the 2011 UGR Conference.

Thank you to Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor for a \$1,000 contribution to the 2011 UGR Conference.

Welcome and thank you to new and renewing members, Maurice Thornton, Melissa Landau-Strauss, Major Eddie Gurewitz, Lucy Wong, Linda Garcia, Matthew Kirk, Nell Stokes-Holmes, Robert K. Radliff, Jr., Charles Touhey & Alice Green, Karen Deeter, Roberta Nunn, Virginia J. Goatley, Brea Barthel, John Wolcott, Dr. Preston Pierce, Bob Wallace, Eleanora Collins, Syd H. Nathans, Jane Meader Nye, Maren & Fred D. Stein, Linda R. Hart, Valerie Flanders, Rita Hoffman, Chris Cummings, Robert A. Emery, Jacqueline C. Robinson, Dr. Elaine M. Handley, Joan Butcher, Beth Spokowsky, Alfred & Lois M. Siegel, Susan DuBois, William J. Lithgow, Dr. MaryNell Morgan & William L. Brown, Don & Vivian Papson, Eliza Rohan Sharpe, Donna C. Lawrence, John J. Coniglio, Lynn P. MacGowan, Jean Adam Forti, Edward H. Brown, Mary E. Jones, J.M. McGrath, Virginia Maffia-Tobler, Nancy R. Rosenberg, Fergus Bordewich, Flora Carr, Joan L. Dater, Susan Haswell, Willie Terry, Cynthia Seacord, Anne

Savage, Ed & Wilhelmina Brown, Pat Barrot, and Clarence S. Johnson. Your support is greatly appreciated! **Thank you!**

Mark your calendars for these upcoming events -

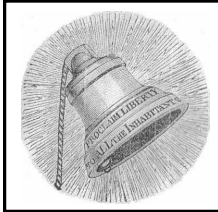
- ◆ **URHPCR Board Meetings** - the 2nd Wednesday of every month, 6:30 - 8:00pm at Sage College, Troy
- ◆ **Property Committee meetings** - Time and location information available by calling 518-432-4432
- ◆ **Conference Planning Meetings** - the 1st Monday of each month, 6-8pm at Sage College, Troy
- ◆ **Finance Committee meetings** - Time and location information available by calling 518-432-4432

Thank you to the 2010 Conference advertisers Adult Learning Center, Albany Chapter of Girl Friends, Inc., Albany County Legislator Doug Bullock, Albany Friends Meeting, APSTA, Assemblyman Ron Canestrari, Bethlehem Neighbors for Peace, BDA, CACC, CDCWRT, CDCLF, Central Tailoring, Cliff Oliver - Photographer, Congressman Paul Tonko, CSEA, First Reformed Church Schenectady, Friends of David Soares, HAF, Honest Weight Food Co-op, Jamalaya Auto, Krispin's Automotive, Mabee Farm, MagCar Insurance Agency, Metropolitan NTM Baptist Church, Modern Press, NY Folklore Society, RCA, Sage-Troy Oral History Project, Sanctuary for Independent Media, Schenectady Branch NAACP, Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity-Beta Psi Boule, Soul Session Edu-tainment, Inc., Sweater Venture, Trinity Institution-Homer Perkins Ctr., Inc., Union College History/Public History Program, URHPCR Board, Women Against War.

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Haiti and the UGR - Part 2 (*cont'd from p.1*)

Haiti's national finances until 1947. In the wake of foreign occupation and rule, Francois "Pappa Doc" Duvalier seized power in 1957, with the support of US political and business interests, launching the astoundingly brutal, corrupt, and ruinous three-decade Duvalier dictatorship, which only ended when a vast popular rebellion - which invoked the memory of the Revolution of 1791-1804 - ousted Francois's son of Jean Claude "Baby Doc" in 1986.

Hope finally triumphed in 1990, when the former priest, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a devotee of Liberation Theology and a leader of the mass movement of the 1980s, won the presidency with 67% of the popular vote. But once again, hope didn't triumph for long. Less than a year later Aristide was overthrown by a military coup backed by the Haitian elites and US-oriented business interests, and a bloodbath followed. With wholesale social breakdown threatening and masses of Haitians fleeing the island for American shores in rickety boats, the US and the UN intervened, arranging new elections. In 1995 an ally of Aristide won with a remarkable 88% of the vote. Aristide

himself returned to the presidency in 2000. But again, any hope for a better future was cut short. A revolt by the anti-Aristide forces linked to those who ousted him in 1991 erupted, and over the next four years, warfare ravaged Haiti until, in 2004 the US again intervened, and, seeking a stable business climate one supposes, flew Aristide into exile, apparently against his will. He remains in exile to this day. A large international peace keeping force was deployed, but intermittent clashes continued. Then the massive 2010 earthquake struck this exhausted, ravaged, and vulnerable country.

The Revolution of 1792 -1804 was a world-historical event, and it is crucial that we all know about it, and celebrate it. But the Revolution's promise was only partial and intermittently fulfilled for the Haitian people. Huge international forces have intervened in and deformed Haiti's development from its very beginnings, to the great detriment of its population. Nonetheless, by all accounts, the memory of 1804 is alive among the people of Haiti. We must do all we can to support them in fully realizing its promise.

*Andor Skotnes, PhD, The Sage Colleges, Troy, New York,
URHPCR Board and Conference Program Committee Member*