

The Freedom Seeker

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The Underground Railroad Turned on Its Head: Old Themes, New Directions

By: Mary Liz and Paul Stewart

Have we got a conference program planned for you! Make sure you reserve the weekend of April 13, 14, and 15 of 2012 to be at Russell Sage College in Troy, New York. **The Underground Railroad Turned on Its Head: Old Themes, New Directions** is the theme for the 11th annual UGR Public History Conference. Every year new, researched information is brought forward at this historic event, and connections are made between the history and its relationship with us today. Knowledge is enriched and understanding stretched as, every year, attendees delve deeper into this formative period in our nation's history and its international impact as a human rights movement. No longer just the stuff of romanticized recollections of hair-breadth, dark-of-night escapes, the Underground Railroad movement can now be more fully understood as the fight for equity, freedom and justice in a nation committed to those principles in its founding document but unwilling to ensure their availability to all its residents.

Friday, April 13 begins this spectacular weekend with the **Educators' Workshop**. While anyone is welcome to attend this workshop, it will be geared for those who find themselves in formal and informal educational settings. Friday morning will be spent touring Schenectady UGR and



African American heritage sites. A tasty lunch served at Rensselaer County Historical Society, one of the collaborating partners, will be followed by an afternoon session with **Alan Singer, PhD**, Professor of Secondary Education and Director of Social Studies

Education at Hofstra University. Alan's PhD in History from Rutgers University, coupled with his experience as an educator and as a social justice advocate, contribute to his lively, interactive presentations.

A new feature this year is the addition of hosted dinners and a **Meet and Greet** session before the opening address on Friday evening. The **Taste of Troy** will provide the opportunity for conference goers to enjoy dinner at local Troy restaurants while accompanied by a Troy resident or conference volunteer who will act as host. Dutch treat will be the order of the evening as participants enjoy dinners selected from a wide array of cultures. Experience Troy's finest cuisine at excellent restaurants serving up everything from micro-brews and hearty pub food to fine cuisine. The Meet and Greet, which will be held at Rensselaer County Historical Society, will be an occasion for conversation, reconnecting with old friends, and networking with new colleagues, while enjoying light refreshments prior to the Opening Address.

Manisha Sinha, PhD, Professor of Afro-American Studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, will commence weekend events with her opening address *Fleeing for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves and the Making of American Abolitionism*. She received her PhD from Columbia University where her dissertation was nominated for the Bancroft prize. She is the author of *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000) and *To Live and Die in the Holy Cause: Abolition and the Origins of America's Interracial Democracy* (Forthcoming, Yale University Press). She is also co-editor of the two volume



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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.

The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence Master Plan

Master Plan completed!

“Contemplating visions for the future life of the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence is exhilarating. Restored, the building will be a treasured symbol of anti-slavery activism in the capital region. Putting it back in service to the human rights principles espoused by the Myers will be a defining achievement for Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region.” (Introduction, *Master Plan for the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence*)



The Master Plan describes a general approach to the restoration of the Myers Residence and an analysis of potential public and private spaces and their capacities, as well as identification of zoning and building code constraints. Suggestions are made for program possibilities and contributions from the Myers Residence to the community.

The *Master Plan for the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence* was prepared by Stephen Tilly Architect with partial funding from the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Johanna Favrot Fund for Historic Preservation.

The UGR Turned On Its Head (cont’d from p.1)

African American Mosaic: A Documentary History from the African Slave Trade to the Twenty-First Century (Prentice Hall, 2004) and *Contested Democracy: Freedom, Race and Power in American History* (Columbia University Press, 2007). In 2011, she was awarded the Chancellor’s Medal, the highest honor bestowed on faculty at the University of Massachusetts and delivered the Distinguished Faculty Lecture.

Barbara McCaskill, PhD, Associate Professor and Co-Director of the Civil Rights Digital Library Initiative at the University of Georgia, will open Saturday’s program with a keynote titled *A Thousand Miles for Freedom: a New Take on the Old Story of Ellen and William Craft, the Georgia Fugitives.* Earning her PhD from Emory University, she specializes in African American and Multicultural American Literature. She published *Post-Bellum, Pre-Harlem: African American Literature and Culture, 1877-1919* (New York University Press, 2006), as well as *Running 1,000 Miles for Freedom: The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (University of Georgia Press, 1999). She is currently working on *A Thousand*



Miles for Freedom: Ellen and William Craft in Transatlantic Literature and Culture (Forthcoming, the University of Georgia Press).

Over 20 **workshops** are scheduled, along with vendors and poster displays. Workshop topics include *Impact of the War of 1812 on African Americans; The UGR’s Impact on US Political Leaders, from Lincoln to Malcolm X; The UGR from a Youth Perspective; Following the North Star...Southward; From Here to Timbucto: the Social and Racial Construction of Wilderness; Using Narratives of Slavery, Freedom, and Kidnapping in a Secondary or Community College Classroom;* and many more. Networking, reconnecting with old acquaintances, and meeting new friends are part of the enriching weekend experience. An evening reception will be held at Rensselaer County Historical Society.

Of special interest at the 11th conference is the inflatable art work **Spectres of Liberty – the Ghost of the Liberty Street Church**. Modeled after Henry Highland Garnet’s Liberty Street Church, visitors will be able to step inside the structure to experience a sense of history while hearing selected excerpts from



Over the Past Months

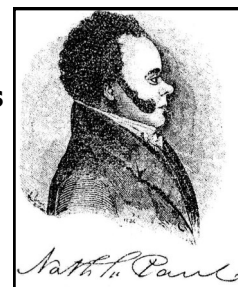


Through the generosity of employees of the **Legal Department of General Electric**, the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence received some needed repairs and maintenance in November, 2011.

The old exterior storm door is no longer. A new storm door stands in its place, both improving the appearance of the front entry way while providing more protection from the elements. While not historic, this door will protect the entryway until full exterior restoration is underway. A missing window pane was replaced and insulating plastic strategically placed over selected windows, helping interior building temperatures to remain stable. Graffiti, the decorative touches left behind by previous residents of the building, was carefully removed so as not to damage any of the historic fabric of the interior walls. Grounds maintenance also received attention. Many thanks are extended to the volunteers of the Legal Department! Your contributions of time and talent are deeply appreciated.

Quotable Quote...

"Slavery, with its concomitants and consequences, in its best attire in which it can possibly be presented, is but a hateful monster, the very demon of avarice and oppression..."



Rev. Nathaniel Paul, *An Address Delivered on the Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery in the State of New York, July 5, 1827*

Remember This ...

Which of these events happened in 1831?

- William Lloyd Garrison said, "I will be heard."
- Nat Turner's rebellion took place.
- The African Methodist Episcopal Church, under the direction of Rev. Richard Allen, formally decided to assist freedom seekers.

ANSWER: All of them

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.

Mark your calendars for these upcoming events -

- ◆ **URHPCR Board Meetings** - the 3rd Thursday of every month, 5:45 - 7:30pm at the Upton Center, Russell Sage College, Troy - visitors welcome - call 518-432-4432 to notify the Board of your planned attendance
- ◆ **Conference Planning Meetings** - the 1st Monday of each month, 6:00 - 7:30pm in Room 105, Gurley Hall, Russell Sage College, Troy - email info@ugrworkshop.com for information or call 518-432-4432
- ◆ Visit www.gerritsmith.org for a full listing of Peterboro programs
- ◆ **North Star Underground Railroad Museum** - North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association invites you to visit this new museum celebrating the UGR history of the Champlain Valley. Information at www.northcountryundergroundrailroad.com.

Welcome and thank you to new and renewing members

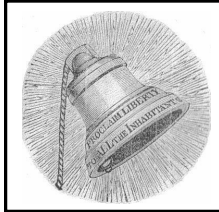
Yvonne Abunaw, Colwyn W. Allen, Victor Artale, John Battin, Linda Becker and John Wolcott, Albert William Brooks, Sharon F. Calhoun, Katherine Chansky, Breena Clarke, Denise Clement, Eleanora Collins, John Coniglio, Rosetta N. Crawley, Joan Dater, Karen Deeter, Albert DeSalvo, Barbara J. DiTommaso, Susan Du Bois, David Easter, Robert Emery, Jean Adam Forti, Roger O. Green, Major Eddie Gurewitz, Linda Hart, Jacqui Hawkins, Peter Hess (Albany Steel), Gertrude B. Hutchinson, Hon. Gerald Jennings, Sylvia Jimison, Eileen Connell Kawola, Leatrice Kemp, Mary Ellen Lee, Mabel S. Leon, Virginia Maffia-Tobler, Stan Malecki, Kenneth M. Mathews, Paul Murray, Sydney Nathan, Niagara University (Castellani Center), Peter G. North, Roberta Villanova Nunn, Jane Meador Nye, Paul W. Rehm, Michael Rhodes-Davey, Paul Rosenburg, Cynthia W. Seacord, Andor Skotnes, Peter G. Sokaris, Catherine Stanford, Maren Stein, Brenda Thomas, Vera Threat, Barbara Traver, Joan E. Traver, Maryellen Urtz, Delores Walters, Naisha Walton, Judy Wellman, and Dorothy H. Willsey. Your support is greatly appreciated!

Correction - URHPCR apologizes to M&T Bank for inadvertently leaving them out of the list of contributors to the restoration of the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence. M&T Bank has been a longstanding contributor to this endeavor.

**UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
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*Underground Railroad History Project
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ON THE WEB AT
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The UGR Turned On Its Head (cont'd from p.2)

Garnet's speeches. "This is a spiritual recapturing of the story of the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church which was a very important location in terms of the Underground Railroad...and Henry Highland Garnet was a very important person in this movement," commented Paul Stewart. This inflatable structure was designed by a trio of RPI art students under the guidance of Professor Igor Vamos and is on loan to Underground Railroad History Project for use at the conference.

Miles Ahead Jazz Quartet will join the conference proceedings as Artists in Residence.



Through performance, lecture, demonstration and audience participation, the musicians, who have played with nationally recognized performers, will trace the social and musical roots of jazz, that genre of music which is said to have been the only truly American-made music, having evolved out of the mixing and recasting of numerous and diverse African and European practices, traditions and materials.

On Sunday Kathryn Sheehan, Rensselaer County

Historian, will lead a tour of sites associated with the abolitionist movement in Rensselaer County. This 2.5 hour **bus tour** will visit sites throughout Rensselaer County and discuss the people who were instrumental in assisting freedom seekers on their journey. The tour, which will travel from sites in Troy to Sand Lake and Hoosick, and include visits to homes, businesses and churches that were integral in the Underground Railroad, will follow many of the same paths that were taken more than 150 years ago.



Mark your calendars! Tell your family, friends, and co-workers! **Turning the Underground Railroad on its Head: Old Themes, New Directions** - April 13, 14, and 15, 2012 - at Russell Sage College and Rensselaer County Historical Society in Troy, New York.

Information and registration are available by visiting www.ugrworkshop.com or by calling 518-432-4432.

See you there!

Paul and Mary Liz Stewart are co-founders of Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. and Scholars in Residence at Russell Sage College, Troy, NY