

Volume IX, No. 1

The Freedom Seeker

Spring - 2012

Bush Memorial at Russell Sage College - Its Anti-Slavery Connections -

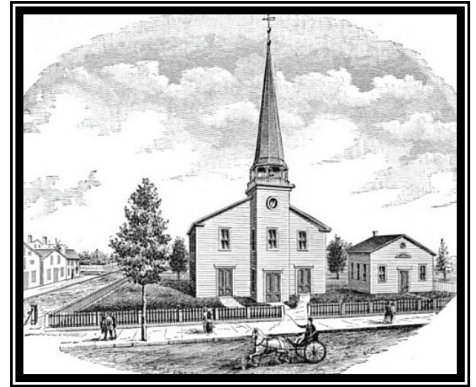
by: Maren Stein, PhD, Professor Emerita, Russell Sage College

Pre-Civil War Troy, New York, was at the forefront of the Industrial Revolution and was the hub of an extensive transportation network, providing many opportunities for Underground Railroad activity. The well-known New York City abolitionist and Underground Railroad participant, Reverend Charles Ray, described the procedure this way, "New York was a kind of receiving depot, when we forwarded to Albany and Troy...we would alternate in sending between Albany and Troy and when we had a large party we would divide between the two cities." (Ray, Florence T. *Sketch of the Life of Reverend Charles B. Ray*. New York: JJ Little and Co., 1897) The First Presbyterian Church in Troy, in cooperation with the local African-American community, was the ground from which Troy's Underground Railroad activity grew.

The First Presbyterian Church was built as a small frame building with an accompanying session hall in 1792. Thirty one years later, in 1823, Reverend Nathan Beman took up the pastorate. A few years into his ministry at First Presbyterian Church, Beman started to attack the politics of slavery. Some of his holiday sermons were particularly devoted to pronouncements on the evils of slavery. In one of the published examples in his Thanksgiving sermon given on November 28, 1861, he calls chattel slavery, "Contrary to the laws of God and Man,"

"opposed to the moral sense of man," and a "great political and moral evil." (Beman, Nathan S.S., *Thanksgiving in the Times of Civil War: Being a Discourse Delivered in First Presbyterian Church, Troy, NY 1861*. Troy, NY: Charles Scribner and Co., 1861)

Many prominent abolitionists were involved with The First Presbyterian Church. Thaddeus Bigelow, president of the Troy Anti-Slavery Society and a Customs House officer, was an officer of The First



Presbyterian Church. In addition to Bigelow, at least three other anti-slavery officers are listed in the church records. These four and Mayor George Tibbits, a strong supporter of the African-American community, were among the city's political and economic elite. Reverend Fayette Shipherd, a white abolitionist and pastor of the young congregation at the Bethel Church of Troy, worked closely with Beman. When, in 1836, attendees of Theodore Dwight Weld's anti-slavery lectures outgrew space at Bethel, Rev. Beman invited Weld to continue his lectures at First Presbyterian. Martin I. Townsend, a local lawyer who supported anti-slavery and other African-American community causes, was a member of The First Presbyterian Church. In 1824 Townsend successfully defended Antonio Lewis, an escapee from slavery. In subsequent years, he campaigned for legal protection for the right of people fleeing slavery to a writ of habeas corpus and trial by jury. In 1860, during the rescue of freedom seeker Charles Nalle, Townsend was immediately contacted and requested to aid Nalle throughout the ordeal. Townsend and at least two others with connections to The First Presbyterian Church were the subjects of an investigation by Federal prosecutors for

<i>Inside this issue</i>	
<i>The Chimneys are Up & the Gables are Straight!</i>	2
<i>July 4th Oration</i>	2
<i>Over the Past Months</i>	3

(Continued on page 4)



URHPCR Board of Directors

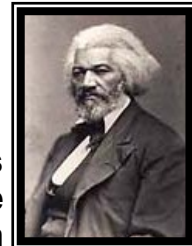
Paul Stewart, Co-founder
with **Mary Liz Stewart**

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Doug Arnott | Michael O'Brien ,
Treasurer |
| Pat Barrot | Anthony Opalka |
| Joe Cavazos | Jim Owens |
| Al DeSalvo ,
President | Kathy Pelham |
| Michael Flinton | Sharon Robinson |
| Annette Johnson | Andor Skotnes |
| Paul Murray ,
Secretary | Barry Walston |
| | Jacqui Williams |

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.

What to the Slave is the 4th of July? July 4th Oration

In 1852 Frederick Douglass challenged the rhetoric of America with the conditions of Africans in America at that time.



"What To The Slave Is the Fourth of July" is a Reader's Theater presentation of the political analysis of Frederick Douglass on the experiences of slavery and the hypocrisy of the principles espoused as the reason for celebrating the 4th in the historical present and post-racial context.

Wednesday, July 4th - 11 am - 1 pm
The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence
194 Livingston Ave., Albany 12210
Free & open to all - Bring your own chair
Refreshments to follow



Join in the 4th annual July 4th Oration

Parking is available on
Third Street and
on Livingston Avenue

The Chimneys are Up and the Gables are Straight!



Since 2004 the view above was what one saw of the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence when looking at the roof. Since late April 2012 and early May the view on the right is what meets the eye. Chimneys have been rebuilt, troubled wall sections have been reworked and straightened, and cracks have been eliminated in the east and west gable walls.

On April 23 a team from Yankee Construction Company came to do critical brick restoration work on the gable walls and rebuild the missing chimneys that graced the Myers Residence since the time of its construction in 1847.

The work was funded by grants from the Environmental Protection Fund, Community Capital Assistance Fund, and funds raised by URHPCR through memberships, fundraising and other activities, totaling \$150,000. The project was facilitated by a line of credit from the Community Loan Fund of the Capital Region. This work brings the project of restoration a significant step forward.



The restoration process will continue with additional engineers' and archeologists' reports, followed by exterior restoration drawings that will go out to bid, followed by implementation of restoration plans. Stay tuned!

Over the Past Months



Welcome to Barry D. Walston, a new Board Member of URHPCR. Barry is a life long community activist. He is employed by the New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute. Barry is involved with the Black Child Development Institute and is committed to education and youth development.

Welcome to Douglass Arnott, a new Board Member of URHPCR. Doug has been a McDonald's franchise owner-operator from 1988 to the present. He is responsible for all aspects of two restaurants. As well, he is involved with Ronald McDonald House Charities, Mercy Ships, and Habitat for Humanity.



Welcome to Jim Owens, a new Board Member of URHPCR. Retired from the Public Employees Federation in 1996, Jim continues his community activism in a variety of ways, including running in many fundraising events. Presently Jim is a Continuing Education student at Siena College. Previously, he was, among other things, a member of the International Typographical Union and the NAACP.



Summer Camps at the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence

Archeological summer camp offered by Hartgen Archeological Associates is designed for children between the ages of 8 and 12. Hands-on archeological experience follows an introduction to the history of the site and the tools of the archeological trade, covering everything from excavation to artifact identification. Camp concludes with the creation of an exhibit presenting what the students have learned about the site.

Albany High School AP students will spend a week working with URHPCR and be a part of history in the making! They will join in archeological investigations, take a walking tour of Albany to learn about the Underground Railroad and the Albany citizens who supported this monumental effort, research topics related to Albany's abolition efforts, and discover how and why Albany played such an important role in the Underground Railroad movement.

The 2012 Artists in Residence Summer Youth Program will actively engage 24 high school aged youth in the Summer Youth Employment Program in a place based service learning experience that will integrate the disciplines of history, art and literacy. Learning about and preserving the inspiring work of Stephen and Harriet Myers will lead to a rich experience through tour design, photography, performance, oral interviews, designing program plans and problem solving, developing work readiness skills, and publicly presenting final projects.

News and Notes

New Mission Statement Adopted by URHPCR:

Underground Railroad History Project
researches and preserves the local and national history
of the anti-slavery and Underground Railroad movements,
their international connections
and their legacies to later struggles;
it engages in public education and dialogue about
these movements and their relevance to modern society.

Mark your calendars for 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 - for information call 518-432-4432 or email info@ugrworkshop.com
- ◆ Visit www.gerritsmith.org for a full listing of programs scheduled at the Gerrit Smith National Historic Landmark - National Abolition Hall of Fame and Smithfield Community Center
- ◆ **North Star Underground Railroad Museum** celebrates the UGR history of the Champlain Valley. Information is available at www.northcountryundergroundrailroad.com.

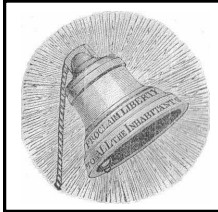
Welcome and thank you to new and renewing members

Alan Singer, Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Albany District Links, Allyn Kay Writesel, Anita Thayer, Anne Savage, Arlene Nock, Arts Center of the Capital Region, Barrington Walston, Beth Spokowsky, Beverly Ivey, Bob Radliff, Brighter Choice Foundation, Capital District Civil War Roundtable, Carol Lewis, Charles Touhey, Charmaine Cave, Darryl Freeman, Deborah A. Gross, Deborah Abel, Derek Scott McGrath, Devorah Tarrow, Don & Vivian Papson, Dora Lee Stanley, Dorothy Von Huene-Greenberg, Edward Pearlman, Ellen Charnoff, Enid Mastriani, Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor, Erika Sanger, Family Planning Advocates of NYS, Flora Carr, Harris Oberlander, Jean & Adam Forti, JoAnne Bakeman, Joseph Mitloff, Julia Holcomb, Julia O'Hara, Kate Clifford Larson, Kate Storms, Katherine Pelham, Kathleen Jimino, Krispin's Automotive Repair, Laura Jones, Laura Lee Linder, Linda Garcia, Linda McLean, Lois Siegel, Lucy McKnight, Lucy Wong, Lynn MacGowan, Marion Reynolds-Dunlevy, Mary Ellen Lee, Mary Nell Morgan, Matthew Bender IV, Matthew Kirk, Melissa Landau-Strauss, Melissa Richburg, Michael Flinton, Murphy Orchards, Nancy Rosenberg, Nell Stokes Holmes, New York Council for the Humanities, Paul Tonko, Paul W. Rehm, Preston Pierce, Regina Keenan, Robert Wallace, Roberta Gasbarre, Roger Tilden, Ron Canestrari, Rosemary Nichols, Russell Sage College, Sarah Stewart, Scott Fadeley, Sheila Rourke, Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity - Beta Psi Boule, Stephen Tilly Architect, Susan Haswell, Susan Schuster, Sylvia Barnard, Tara Ross, The Troy Savings Bank Charitable Foundation, Vera Michelson, Vicie Rolling, Virginia Goatley, Walter Chura, Willie Terry, and WMHT. Your support is greatly appreciated!

**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

Bush Memorial at Russell Sage *(cont'd from p.1)*

their part in the Nalle rescue, but charges were never filed.

Under the mentorship of Reverend Nathan S.S. Beman, abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet was trained in ministerial duties, being prepared for taking up the role of pastor of the Liberty Street Church in 1840. Prior to Garnet's pastorate, the session house that was built alongside The First Presbyterian Church at First and Congress Streets was purchased in 1834 for \$100, moved four blocks away to Liberty Street, refurbished, and opened as a "Negro schoolhouse." In 1840 the schoolhouse became The Liberty Street Presbyterian Church, an all black congregation which quickly became a center for anti-slavery advocacy and a refuge for freedom seekers. The First Presbyterian Church that remained at First and Congress Streets was then replaced with a second building that is today's Bush Memorial.

Russell Sage College acquired The First Presbyterian Church building in 1975 for use as a lecture space and concert hall, renaming it the Julia Howard Bush Memorial Center in honor of a longtime college trustee who was also a member of the church. Subsequent renovations to the building have included handicapped access to the

building and stage, installation of climate controlled heat and air conditioning, wiring for technological needs, an elevator, a computer integrated presentation system, and balcony seating. While these changes have transformed Bush Memorial into a modern presentation venue that accommodates 400 people, Bush Memorial stands as a witness to the inspiring work of those who fought for justice and equity in the Underground Railroad movement and it stands as a challenge for us today to carry on that struggle for liberty for all.



Bush Memorial, Russell Sage College

Maren Stein, PhD, Political Science, is professor emerita of Russell Sage College, Troy, New York. She continues to research local history while enjoying attendance at baseball and softball games and school plays and concerts.