

The Freedom Seeker

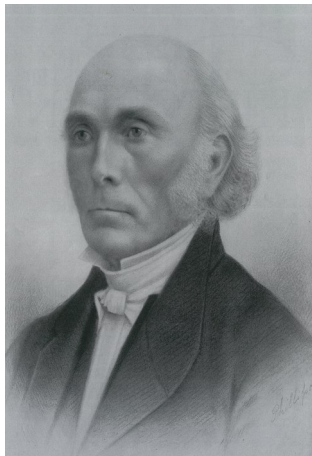
Volume XI, No. 3

Fall, 2014

Moses Pierce and Esther Carpenter Pierce, Westchester's Friends of Freedom

By Dorothee von Huene Greenberg

Little-known heroes of Pleasantville, New York, Moses Pierce (1816 to 1886) and his wife, Esther Carpenter Pierce (1815 to 1900), were peaceful Quaker farmers who served a vital role in Westchester County's underground railroad. They left no documents, but in 1886, the year Moses Pierce died, historian John Todd wrote of Moses, "early convinced with his entire family of the injustice and wrong slave holding he cheerfully met the odium and danger attendant upon such a course at the time, and, together with his son, speeded many fugitive slaves along the mythical track of the "Underground Railroad" to the next station at the Jay Homestead *en route* for Canada." There is no mention here of Esther, but her matching portrait hangs next to that of Moses upstairs in the Friends' meeting house in Chappaqua.



Quakers were the first religious group in America to officially reject slavery beginning in 1750's. Their efforts were accompanied by disturbing contemporaneous events. Mobs frequently invaded halls and attacked speakers. Public sentiment about slavery grew so intense and discussions about it in Washington so inflaming that Congress adopted a "gag rule" in 1836, tabling petitions to end slavery. Still, many individuals associated with Westchester County would have supported and inspired Moses and Esther in their efforts to help freedom seekers. Among them were itinerant Quaker John Woolman (1720-1772) whose abolitionist ideas were based on the Quaker concept of the spiritual equality of all persons, the brotherhood

of all men, and the concept "that the black people did not voluntarily come to dwell here." Following in his footsteps as a Public Friend, Elias Hicks (1748-1830), a resident of Long Island, reports in his journal that he visited the quarterly meetings in Purchase which Joseph Carpenter and his daughter Esther attended; Chappaqua where Moses' family attended; Nine Partners where Moses' mother had been educated; and the Oblong Meeting near Pawling, which David Irish attended between 1781 and 1829. Doubtless, Esther and her father Joseph Carpenter, Moses Pierce and David Irish had the opportunity to hear Hicks, and he must have inspired prominent abolitionists in New York State, including John Jay (1745-1829) of Bedford and his son William Jay (1789-1858).

Moses and Esther came from Quaker families, and probably the strong abolitionist sentiments their parents shared helped bring them together. Their fathers had collaborated, and, according to Aaron Macy Powell, "the mantel of her beloved father [Joseph Carpenter] descended" on Esther who had become such an admirer of abolitionist Lydia Maria Child by age 17 that she was "one of three young women who attended the convention in New York City, in 1833, which organized the New York anti-slavery society." Married in 1840, they honored prominent abolitionist friends by naming one son John Jay Pierce and a daughter, born just after passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, Lydia Maria Child Pierce.



Moses became so prominent in New York's anti-slavery movement that in 1847 William Jay, son of Supreme Court Justice John Jay, residing in Bedford, NY, published in 1848 a letter to Moses in Boston's weekly *Liberty Press*. In it Jay declares, "let us harbor . . . every fugitive who seeks our protection, (Cont'd. on p. 4)

Inside this issue	
Call for Proposals 14th Annual Conference	P. 2
Young Abolitionists' Open House	P. 3
News and Notes	P. 3



URHPCR Board of Directors

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

Barry Walston
President

Mike O'Brien
Vice-President

Alexandra Sautin
Secretary

Doug Arnott
Treasurer

Pat Barrot
Christine Cowieson
Dale Black-Pennington
Julia Hastings
Paul Murray
Jim Owens
Ralph Pennington, Jr.
Sharon Robinson
Mary Scanlon
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, NY 12201 or
info@UndergroundRailroadHistory.org



Meet Dorian the Historian and test your knowledge of the Underground Railroad in the Capital Region. Chances are you'll find out a few things you don't know - and have fun doing it!

Find Dorian at:

<http://undergroundrailroadhistory.org/historymystery/>

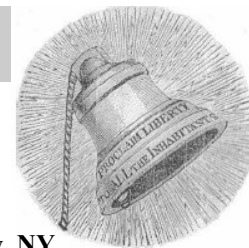
Call For Proposals

Breaking Free: Civil War, Emancipation, and Beyond - April 17-19, 2015

The 14th Annual Underground Railroad Public History Conference

Organized by Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc.

To be held at Russell Sage College, Troy, NY and at The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence, Albany, NY



2015 commemorates the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, the assassination of Lincoln, and the start of reconstruction. For the 14th annual public history conference, URHPCR invites workshops, presentations and activities that explore the relationship of the UGRR to these developments and to the complexities of shaping the emerging society which followed the civil war, as well as explore the relationship of these developments to our present day.

We invite proposals that address reinterpretations, teaching, new research, and other ways to illustrate, address, and understand these developments historically and contemporarily. We welcome proposals that are related to the UGRR, the institution of slavery, the Civil War, the assassination of Lincoln, the transition to a post-war society, reconstruction, and related topics.

Roundtable and interactive workshop experiences are encouraged. Panels, cultural and artistic activities, and media productions are welcome. Workshop presentations will be paired if thematically related. Workshops will be 75 minutes long if two presenters are paired, 60 minutes if one person presents. Presenters will be notified of session length in advance.

Proposals should include: (1) title, (2) brief content description, (3) type of presentation, (4) names and full contact information, including titles, of presenters/facilitators, (5) target audience (youth, adult, multi-age, family with young children), and (6) technology needs.

Submit proposals by October 30, 2014 to URHPCR, PO Box 10851, Albany, NY 12201 or via email to urhpcr2015@gmail.com

2014 Young Abolitionist Teen Scholars' Open House

That's Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan (third from right) visiting the Open House, which showcases work done by teen scholars and their mentors in July. From film-making to gardening, choreography to grant-writing, students learned by doing during a busy month of cooperation and accomplishment. New gardens flourished, and visitors could purchase flowers and heirloom vegetables. It has probably been quite a while since Livingston Avenue has been home to a farm stand! Thank



you to our sponsors for supporting the great work of the Institute: TU Hope Fund, Touhey Family Foundation, M&T Charitable Trust, Stewart's Holiday Match, First Niagara Bank, and Price Chopper's Golub Foundation. Mark your calendars and plan to visit the 2015 Teen Scholars' Institute Open House on the last Thursday in July. —



News and Notes

Mission Statement of 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.

Welcome and thank you to new and renewing members:

Barbara Traver, Chris Cummings, Chrys Ballerano, Darby Penney, David Hochfelder, Devorah Tarrow, Dora Lee Stanley, Douglass Arnott, Ellen Picotte, Fredda Peritz, Heather Blank, Joan Traver, John Coniglio, John Wolcott, Linda Hart, Lucinda Huggins, Mary E. Jones, Noelle Kinsch, Paul Hermann, Peter Sokaris, Robert Emory, Ron Canestrari, Ruth Senchyna, Sandy & Mario Salerno, Sharon Calhoun, Sue Clark, Susan Haswell, Sylvia Barnard, William Suggs, Zoe Nousiainen

Mark your calendars and plan to attend -

- ◆ **URHPCR Board Meetings** - 3rd Thursday of every month, 5:45 - 7:30pm at Russell Sage College, Troy
- ◆ **Conference Planning Mtg** - 1st Monday of each month, 6:00 - 7:30pm in Rm. 105, Gurley Hall at Russell Sage College, Troy
- ◆ **Building & Properties Mtg** - monthly, 5:30 - 6:30pm at The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence
- ◆ **Finance Committee Mtg** - 2nd Tuesday of each month, 5:30-6:30pm at Albany Center for Economic Success
- ◆ **Gardening and Grounds Beautification** - Thursdays, 10am - 1pm, weekly, at The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence and the Abram Johnson Garden

Information about these meetings and events is available at 518-432-4432 or at info@UndergroundRailroadHistory.org



Bicycling the Erie Canalway bike path - Oct. 7-17

Paul and Mary Liz will bicycle 730 miles to bring attention to the important role the Erie Canal played in the UGRR movement and to raise funds for Underground Railroad History Project! Pledge today at <http://undergroundrailroadhistory.org/event/biking-along-the-erie-canal/>

National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum - 2013 Inductee Commemoration - Oct. 24-26 - details at <http://www.nationalabolitionhalloffameandmuseum.org/page/page/8452922.htm>

Questions? Concerns? Contributions? Interested in volunteering? Contact us by calling 518-432-4432 or by visiting www.UndergroundRailroadHistory.org.

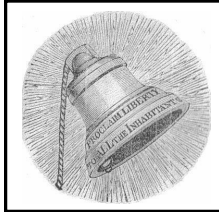
**UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
HISTORY PROJECT OF THE
CAPITAL REGION, INC.**

P.O. Box 10851
Albany NY 12201

Phone: 518-432-4432

Fax: 518-432-4432

Email: info@UndergroundRailroadHistory.org



***Learn the Past. Be the Present,
Create the Future*** ®

ON THE WEB AT

UNDERGROUNDRAILROADHISTORY.ORG

Westchester's Friends of Freedom *(continued from page 1)*

regardless of the statutes which make such acts penal offences.”

Fugitives stopping at the Pierce home traveled a simple route including “stations” approximately 30 miles apart. Presumably coming by skiff from Long Island, their first stop in Westchester was the home of Joseph Carpenter in New Rochelle, the second that of Moses and Esther Pierce in Pleasantville, the third the home of William Jay of Bedford, and, according to a letter written by Moses’ son Jonathan, the last was the home of David Irish near Pawling, NY. Related to Moses by marriage, twenty-four years his senior and living to be 93, Irish must have had many years of collaboration with the Pierce family helping fugitives find freedom in Canada.

Prosperous farmers in a small village, Moses and Esther lived during troubled times, but they were courageous and caring community leaders who, inspired by their Quaker faith, helped make America what it is today.



Dr. Dorothee von Huene Greenberg teaches at Dyson College of Arts and Sciences of Pace University. A version of this article was published in The Westchester Historian, Winter, 2012.

Friends Meeting House in Chappaqua, New York. Moses and Esther's portraits are hung here, and their graves are in the adjacent cemetery.