

# The Freedom Seeker

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Winter 2018

## New York's Grand Emancipation Jubilee: Essays on Slavery, Resistance, Abolition, Teaching, and Historical Memory

Written by Alan J. Singer, PhD and Reviewed by Mary Liz Stewart

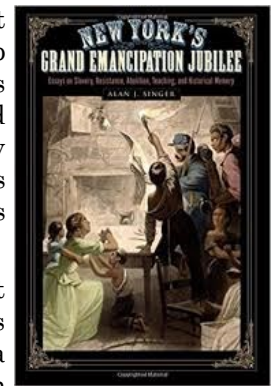
**B**attles over how we understand the past help define who we are in the present and the possibilities for our future. (Singer, Alan J. *New York State's Grand Emancipation Jubilee*, p.162) This foundational principle ties together the essay topic choices and their content in Alan Singer's newest book *New York's Grand Emancipation Jubilee* that was published in May 2018 by SUNY Press. This sequel to *New York and Slavery: Time to Teach the Truth*, published by SUNY Press in 2008, is an engaging, hard to put down collection of essays that had a previous life as panel and workshop presentations and as articles prepared for academic journals. Revised and collected together in one volume they offer an eye-opening, critical examination of slavery, resistance, abolition, emancipation, race and public memory from a New York City and New York State perspective that is applicable to the entire nation. While re-examining the past, Singer seamlessly weaves throughout his discourse the challenge of what do we do with this new knowledge, how do we use it to better understand who we are today, both as individuals and as communities and as a nation, and how will we use this knowledge to move forward into the future to be a more just society.

Alan Singer, a prolific writer, received his Masters and Doctoral degrees from Rutgers University and is currently Professor of Secondary Education in the School of Education and Allied Human Services at Hofstra University. Beginning his educational career in a high school social studies classroom, Alan let's his 'on the ground' classroom experiences inform his writing of his valuable and provocative reflections on race, slavery, and American history. He shares his insightful commentaries on Huffington Post and at public programs. He continues to engage with high schoolers through his colleagues

and through the student teachers he mentors which keep him current on young people's perspectives and experiences and action responses to contemporary injustices, having thus earned his street cred to become known as Reeces Pieces.

Alan's review of relevant literature coupled with his own research offers the reader a substantially documented examination of his thesis. Berlin, McManus, Aptheker, Foner, Still, Greeley, and many other greats referenced by Singer provide the reader with a rich selection of over 300 sources for further investigation. An incredibly detailed index complements the resource section and makes this text remarkably searchable. Inclusion of Teaching Notes in each chapter offers models of pertinent, thought provoking questions and related primary document text for both classroom and public conversation use.

Chapter 2, 'Resistance! Resistance! Resistance! New York's Black Abolitionists and the Coming of the Civil War' is a breath of fresh air in reference to the standard Underground Railroad canon. The highlight of this chapter is the emphasis on Black activism, which so often gets overwhelmed by the historians' focus on the ideological debates of white abolitionists. The voices of Black abolitionists repeatedly call not only for the abolition of the institution of slavery, but also call for the rights of full citizenship. According to Singer, "...it was black activism, much of which was centered in New York State, that moved the challenge to slavery from the margins to the center of political debate." (Singer, Alan J. *New York State's Grand Emancipation Jubilee*, p.30). Recoverable documents detailing the ideology of and activities engaged in by Black abolitionists have



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## URHPCR Board of Directors

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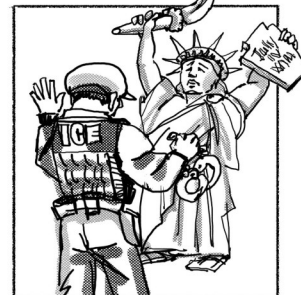
**Brenda Twigg**

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 NYS, in the United States, and relating that history with us today. This newsletter is published three times a year. Editorial inquiries can be sent to URHPCR, 194 Livingston Ave., Albany, NY 12210 or [info@undergroundrailroadhistory.org](mailto:info@undergroundrailroadhistory.org).

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## Seeking Sanctuary: Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness

Underground Railroad Freedom Seekers sought sanctuary in Canada, Mexico, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe. Today's expression of sanctuary acknowledges that memory but is demonstrated in contemporary border confrontations at the Mexican and Canadian borders and in the seeking of sanctuary within the United States by those fleeing discrimination and oppression. We are all called to action to insure for all the human rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. LibertyCon 2019 will explore the seeking of sanctuary, its relationship to the Underground Railroad movement, and to the broad issue of Sanctuary.

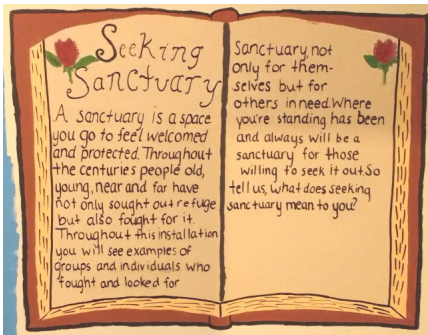


No Proof of Citizenship!  
No Sanctuary!  
Cuff Her!

LibertyCon 2019 - this dynamic program will be held at Siena College in 2019 on March 29 and 30 and at The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence on March 31. Details are available online at [UndergroundRailroadHistory.org/conference](http://UndergroundRailroadHistory.org/conference) or by calling 518-432-4432.

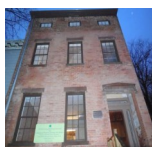
Please help spread the word. Bring friends, family, neighbors! A program not to be missed.

## Looking forward to seeing you in the months ahead!



**Seeking Sanctuary Exhibit** Our nation was founded on the principle of sanctuary. It has been reiterated by our embrace of the Statue of Liberty and the engraved poem on its base. Come be in the presence of sanctuary

at The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence. Come be enriched by the mural installed by the teen Abolition Artist Mural Group 2018. Share your reflections on what sanctuary mean to you. Stay tuned for Seeking Sanctuary community conversations.



**Tours of The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence** Bring yourself, family, friends, colleagues, business associates, church group for a tour experience of The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence. Sit on

historic furniture. Read mid-19th century newspapers. Play with toys from the mid-19th century. Be in the place where history happened.

**The Museum Shop** at The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence is open for your business. Books, handmade jewelry, mugs, t-shirts, Cliff Oliver photographs, Harriet Myers dolls and handmade doll clothing and more for young and older.



**Moving Heaven and Earth** A musical series of jubilation, tribulation, and liberation coming to a venue near you! Bringing history to life through benefit concerts for URHP. Moving Heaven and Earth is the blended musical family of two Capital Region groups: The Heavenly Echoes with their Southern-soul-style gospel and JV & the Cutters with their Chicago-style original blues, celebrating their common heritage and continuing legacy in American roots music. Stay tuned for performance date announcements.



**Tim Wise** is the featured speaker at Siena College's 32nd Annual Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King Lecture Series on Race and Nonviolent Social Change. Wise will be speaking on January 30 at 7pm at the Marcelle Athletic Complex of Siena College located at 515 Loudonville Road, Loudonville, New York 12211. See you there!

## Over the Past Months

Welcome to new board members Steven O'Connor, AnnMarie Hess, Natalie Criscione, and Brenda Twiggs pictured here, and to David Hochfelder, Sam Fein, and Brittany Beyus. Each brings their expertise to share with URHP to help sustain and expand its outreach and impact. Board members are asked to actively participate in a committee, to contribute financially, and to be an ambassador in the community for URHP.



## Freedom Seeker Stories



St. Lawrence Hall, Toronto, Ontario, Canada (2012)

In the 1850s Saint Lawrence Hall was one of the places in Toronto where freedom seekers who had settled in Canada exercised their civic responsibilities. The meeting hall housed many meetings of the fugitive community where plans were worked out for civic

engagement, education, development of social services and many other areas of self help in the new country. Figures such as Samuel Ringgold Ward, who had fled the US for his role in the Jerry rescue in Syracuse, argued and debated the structuring of civic life. Such debates informed the lives of freedom seekers as they became British subjects and citizens in Canada under British rule.



St. Lawrence Hall, Toronto, Ontario, Canada - drawing depicting mid-19th century appearance




## News and Notes

### **Mission Statement of URHPCR:**

Underground Railroad History Project researches and preserves the local and national history of the Underground Railroad movement, its international connections, and its legacy to later struggles, engaging in public education and dialogue about this movement and its relevance to modern society.

### **Join with other volunteers in making great things happen -**

- ◆ **URHPCR Board Mtg** - 3rd Tuesday of each month, 5:45 - 7:00pm at The Myers Residence
- ◆ **Conference Planning Mtg** - 1st Monday of each month, 6:00 - 8:00pm at The Myers Residence
- ◆ **Building & Properties Mtg** - 1st Thursday of each month, 6:00 - 7:30pm at The Myers Residence
- ◆ **Collections Committee Mtg** - 2nd Thursday of each month, 6:00 - 7:00pm at The Myers Residence
- ◆ **URHP Reads** - 2nd Friday of each month, 5:30 - 7:30pm at The Myers Residence

Questions? Concerns? Contributions? Interested in volunteering?  
Contact us at (518) 432-4432 or at [UndergroundRailroadHistory.org](http://UndergroundRailroadHistory.org)  
Follow us on Facebook  and Twitter  and Instagram 

## Stevie Wants You



**Thank you to our donors:** David Hochfelder, Margaret Snowden, Darius Shahinfar, Linda Byrnes, Edward Nizalowski, Worth Gretter, Marey Bailey, Connie LoPorto, Marc Lee, Ruth Baines, Nora McDowell, Alexandra Sautin, Linda Wistar, Paula Hennesy, Deborah Emmons-Andarawis, Linda Becker, Sharon Robinson, Paul Stewart, Chris Cummings, Jennifer Burns, Ken & Margaret Claflin, Anne Savage, Angela Neal

### **Welcome and thank you to new and renewing members:**

Eric Washington, Ellen Thea Chernoff, Deborah Goss, Steven and Roberta Sandler, Likita Wooten, Laura Lee, Eileen Kawola, Reginald Harris, MaryNell Morgan & Bill Brown, Mary Elizabeth Jones, Wilhelmina Brown, Mark Barth, Yvonne Abunaw, Deborah A. Goss, Dora Lee Stanley, Claire Stahler, Leslie Boyer, Sandy Smith, Mario Salerno, Sharon Calhoun, Joan Fuess, Tom Ellis, Ronald J.M. Ross, James & Lynne Dolan

**Renew your membership - Invite someone you know to become a member - give the gift of membership - SUBSCRIPTION memberships and ONE-TIME PAYMENT options are available on the Membership Page at [UndergroundRailroadHistory.org](http://UndergroundRailroadHistory.org)**

"I made a short visit in September 2018 to Stephen and Harriet Myers residence being preserved. One of many parts of history. I'm proud of accomplishments of our ancestors as we continue making more history day by day. God bless."

*Likita Wooten*, Galveston, Texas (10.04.18)

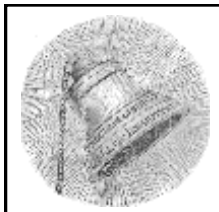
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## **New York's Grand Emancipation Jubilee (cont'd)**

been making their way into public discourse and changing the Underground Railroad narrative. The lack of a homogenous response on the part of Black abolitionists gives evidence of free-thinking individuals who ran the gamut from supporting an aggressive, immediatist response to the institution of slavery to a more conservative focus on the provision of assistance to freedom seekers. As the Black abolitionists had more at risk than their white counterparts, due to laws of the day and the imposition of discriminatory practices and the racist sentiments of many New Yorkers, the work of Black abolitionists becomes even more inspiring. It was Black abolitionists such as Stephen Myers and Peter Williams working in concert with others who forced the demise of the colonization movement. It was Black abolitionists such as Henry Highland Garnet and David Walker who advocated for the enslaved to take up arms against enslavers. It was Black abolitionists such as Louis Napoleon and David Ruggles who openly opposed the Federal Fugitive Slave Laws. However, in the midst of the recovery of this important information, there is a desperate need to uncover the work of Black women in the abolitionists movement, especially women who were New York State residents, as their stories are few and light of content.

Kudos to Alan Singer for capturing these great essays in one volume and making them a community resource. *New York's Grand Emancipation Jubilee* is a must read for formal and informal educators, high school and college students, and the adult general public. While it is not the final word on slavery, resistance, abolition, emancipation, race and public memory, as research on many fronts continues to add to the understanding of this significant episode in American history, it is, without a doubt, a major contribution to understanding where we, as a nation, have come from so that we may better understand where we are today and where can go tomorrow.

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*New York's Grand Emancipation Jubilee: Essays on Slavery, Resistance, Abolition, Teaching, and Historical Memory*  
-- Alan J. Singer, PhD, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 2018