

The Freedom Seeker

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The Execration of History

Written by Alan J. Singer, PhD, Hofstra University

The New York State Democratic Party delegation in the Reconstruction era House of Representatives played a central role in opposition to securing the rights of formerly enslaved African Americans in the South. Their antagonism to the 13th and 14th Amendments to the United States Constitution reprised the role many Democrats played during the secession crisis when Mayor Fernando Wood called on New York City to secede from the Union along with the South and during the Civil War when the Copperhead, anti-war, press enflamed hostility to the war effort and racial animosity.

The historic liberalism of New York City and upstate urban areas was definitely not as evident as the synergy between immigrant voters and Democratic Party political machines that helped undermine Radical Reconstruction. This alliance was captured in an 1868 political cartoon by Thomas Nast for Harper's Weekly, "This is a White Man's Government." The image shows an ape-like Irishman from New York City's 5-Points district, former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, a founder of the Ku Klux Klan, and August Belmont, a New York financier and chair of the post-war national Democratic Party, standing with their feet on a prone Black man, a Civil War veteran. Lying on the ground with him are a desecrated American flag and a discarded ballot box. In the background are depictions of anti-Black atrocities during the 1863 New York draft riot. The caption to the cartoon was taken from the 1868 Democratic Party platform declaring the Reconstruction Acts passed by Congress to be "usurpations and unconstitutional, revolutionary and void."

Congressman Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, chair of the House Ways and Means Committee and champion of Black citizenship rights, was probably the most radical of the Radical

Republicans in the House of Representatives during Reconstruction. In one of his better-known speeches, Stevens warned that failure to ensure racial equality in the post-Civil War period would condemn his colleagues to the "execration of history"; they and the nation would be cursed for all time. An examination of the proceedings of the House of Representatives in the Congressional

Globe shows that during the post-Civil War Reconstruction period Steven's greatest adversaries and the most outspoken opponents of Congressional or Radical Reconstruction were members of the New York State Democratic Party Congressional delegation led by Fernando Wood, John Winthrop Chanler, and James Brooks and allies like Albany's John V. L. Pruyn and Martin Kalbfleisch of Brooklyn. While frequently divided into warring and shifting political factions on their home turfs, New York Democrats were more or less a unified and vitriolic opposition in the House to Radical Reconstruction and justice for the formerly enslaved.

At a heavily attended Union Square pre-election rally in September 1864, New York City Democrats approved resolutions declaring "the only just purposes of the present war are the restoration of the Union of the States, and the authority of the Constitution" and opposition to the Republican Party's "impracticable attempt to raise the black man to the political and social level of the white."

As Congressman Martin Kalbfleisch of Brooklyn reminded the House of Representatives in January 1865, "The platform upon which those us of from New York representing Democratic constituencies stood when we were elected was, 'the Constitution as it is and the Union as it was.'"

Fernando Wood is the best-known and documented member of the anti-war New York City Copperhead Democrats who fought against Congressional Reconstruction. He was a wealthy merchant involved in the cotton coastal trade with the South and a successful investor in local real estate who financially benefited from his pro-slavery, anti-war, political stance. New York City, itself, was a hub of the global cotton trade, as both a financial and shipping center.

During the 1850s and 1860s, Wood was a stalwart in Democratic Party political machines that drew electoral support from the city's immigrant communities, at times being aligned with Tammany Hall and at other times with the breakaway Mozart Hall club. He was first elected Mayor of New York City in 1855. As Mayor in January 1861, Wood suggested New York City secede from the Union along with the South to maintain their business ties. In a speech to the city Common Council, Wood argued the "dissolution of the Federal Union is inevitable"

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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 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.

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Freedom Seeker Corner

William Jones, a freedom seeker, passed through Albany on his way to Canada. He wrote this letter to William Still of Philadelphia, who had helped him:

MR. STILL:—I take this opportunity of writing a few lines to you hoping that it may find you in good health and your family, as well. I am well at present and doing well at present. I am now in a store and getting sixteen dollars a month at the present. I feel very much oblige to you and your family for your kindness to me while I was with you. I have got along without any trouble at all. I am now in Albany City. Give my love to Mrs and Mr Miller and tell them I am very much obliged to them for there kindness. Give my love to my Brother Nore Jones. Tell him I should like to hear from him very much and he must write. Tell him to give my love to all of my particular friends and tell them I should like to see them very much. Tell him that he must come to see me for I want to see him for something very particular. Please answer this letter as soon as possible and excuse me for not writing sooner as I don't write myself. No more at the present.

WILLIAM JONES.

direct replies to 125 Lydius Street

(Lydius St. is today's Madison Avenue in Albany, NY)

Looking forward to seeing you in the months ahead!



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.

Yours for the Oppressed An original play based on an episode in the lives of local black abolitionists Harriet Myers and Stephen Myers and the struggles faced by black Americans involved in the Underground Railroad, *Yours for the Oppressed* will be performed by members of the Black Theatre Troupe of Upstate New York.



Yours for the Oppressed is based in the seminal research of Paul and Mary Liz Stewart, Independent Researchers and Scholars in Residence at Russell Sage College.

Yours for the Oppressed was written by Siena College students Heather Frederick, Hunter Frederick, Olivia Waldron, and Phillip Killian under the guidance of

Krysta Dennis, PhD, Producer of Creative Arts at Siena College.

Performance Place - The Myers Residence

Performance Dates - June 21, 22, 23, 28, 29, 30

Performance Times - June 21 & 28 at 7pm

- June 22, 23, 29, 30 at 2pm

Admission – Free with a requested donation of \$10/person

Bring family, friends, neighbors, colleagues, acquaintances to this engaging performance sure to change your understanding of Underground Railroad history.



July 4th Oration Framed by Frederick Douglass's 1852 speech, "What to the Slave is Your Fourth of July?", this annual program begins at 11am and includes a pot-luck lunch at 12noon. David Hochfelder, Public History Professor at SUNY Albany, will be one of the guest presenters providing an interpretive context to Douglass's speech.

Leave a Legacy with Underground Railroad History Project Learn about maximizing your tax deductions through charitable giving by leveraging one of many planned giving opportunities. Call Mary Liz Stewart for more information - 518-432-4432

Over the Past Months



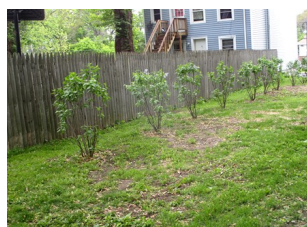
Welcome to Tanya Hollie, Site Manager with Underground Railroad History Project. Tanya brings years of experience in working with the public in the service industry. Her hard working volunteer efforts pegged her as the perfect candidate for the Site Manager position. As such, Tanya is responsible for maintenance and beautification of The Myers Residence and the Campus, organizing volunteers and programs and fundraising related to the site, providing tours of The Myers Residence and other services as needed.



Visitors to The Myers Residence are invited to interact with history - sit on period furniture, read period newspapers, try on period appropriate clothing. Our guests pictured here courageously and delightedly stepped into history when they modeled hand made period costumes made by generous community volunteers.



Trivia Night - what a blast! Questions around the topics of Black culture, music, national and local UGRR history challenged team participants' knowledge. Prizes were awarded to winning team members. Organized by VISTA Fellow Jazzie Grey with planning team members Bart Cohen and Joanne Skinner, all in attendance had a laughter-filled evening! Stay tuned for Trivia Nights Under the Stars at The Myers Residence!



Lincoln Lilacs now grace The Myers Residence Campus and airwaves. The fragrance fills the air! The Arbor Day celebration was spearheaded by Lauren Axford, Executive Director of Pine Hollow Arboretum, in partnership with URHP, Albany Fund for Education, College of St. Rose, NYS Department of Conservation, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the City of Albany Department of General Services and Forestry Division. A beautiful contribution to be enjoyed by all.

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.

I Heard it Said at The Myers Residence -

“The Residence was an inspiring experience learning about a story outside of a ‘typical’ Underground Railroad narrative. It is inspiring to think of the Myers as abolitionists who did everything in their power to help people escape to freedom, find jobs, healthcare, etc.” (Valerie, 5/2019)

“I love how they made us feel a part of the history instead of just talking. Love it!” (Glenda, 4/2019)

“Love this place! Black history like this needs to be protected and preserved, especially in NY.” (Kenneth, 4/2019)

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



Stevie Wants You



Thank you to our donors: Paul Murray, David Goodall, Marilyn Sango-Jordan, Anthony Opalka, Elizabeth Barlow, Susan DuBois, Ralph Pennington, Jr., Gertrude Thun, Sara McDarby, Linda S. Fisher, Lewis and Irene Greenstein, Deborah LaFond, Fran Lehen, Virginia Ruggiero

Welcome and thank you to new and renewing members: Ralph Pennington, Jr., Anne King, Barbara Counterman, Julia Holcomb, David Hochfelder, Cheryl Randall, Susan Isaksen, Mario Salerno, Margaret Snowden, Margaret Lavelle, William L. Brown & MaryNell Morgan Brown, Tom Ellis, Mary Ellen Lee, Angela Neal

Donations and Subscription Memberships are an incredibly helpful and convenient way to support the transformative work of Underground Railroad History Project.

Together, through Underground Railroad History Project, we can make a positive difference in our world today that will contribute to a better tomorrow.

Make a donation - Renew your membership - Invite someone you know to become a member - give the gift of membership - SUBSCRIPTION DONATIONS and SUBSCRIPTION MEMBERSHIPS and ONE-TIME PAYMENT options are available on the Membership Page and on the Donation Page at UndergroundRailroadHistory.org

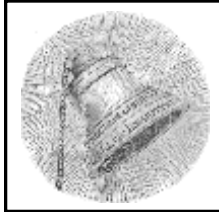
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5 Boros to Freedom - Celebrating Themes of Pinkster



boros to freedom
NYC

Celebrating the Pinkster themes of self-reliance, supporting others, self-assertion, and community, **5 Boros to Freedom** looks to highlight these themes through a variety of program offerings to be held in each of the five boroughs of New York City on June 3-16, 2019. Originally a Dutch religious holiday brought to New York City by Dutch colonists, Africans transformed Pinksterfest into an African festival that came to be known as Pinkster and which was enjoyed by an eclectic mix of young and old, African and European, enslaved and free, and Native Americans. Drawing upon African cultural traditions, Pinkster provided the occasion for creation of a social space and communal identity. Pinkster was banned in New York State in 1811 out of fear of the gathering of large numbers of celebrants in one location at one time.

5 Boros to Freedom, as an extension of the work of Underground Railroad History Project, intends to revive and renew this community celebration in New York City, honoring the communal ancestors, paying tribute to their fortitude and courage, and drawing strength from them as we celebrate these themes of self-reliance, supporting others, self-assertion and community in the present.

A complete schedule of events is available at —
www.UndergroundRailroadHistory.org/events-calendar/ and
on Facebook at [@5BorostoFreedom](https://www.facebook.com/5BorostoFreedom).

