Conference: “Exceptional, Awesome, Enlightening”

It was our most ambitious and successful conference yet. Over 350 people attended Saturday workshops alone for the Fifth Anniversary UGR History Conference at Russell Sage College the last weekend in February. While the majority of participants came from the Capital Region, many came from communities scattered throughout New York, Massachusetts and Vermont. Still others came from as far away as Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Iowa, Kentucky, Maryland, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Ontario.

This year we added a Friday evening dinner, with guest speaker Professor David Blight, Director of the Gilder-Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University. To a sold out audience Blight addressed the role played by myth and memory in shaping our knowledge of the past, especially of the Civil War and slavery. The effect of such influences on our use of historical evidence generated a lively discussion, during the question and answer period as well as after the dinner. Professor Erica Ball of Union College addressed the Saturday plenary on the networks of “brothers, sisters and revolutionaries” that sustained the Underground Railroad as a social movement.

Cold and blustery weather cut into attendance at the Saturday evening dance party led by old-time fiddler Earl White. But White led the several dozen people gathered there through a spirited and amazing experience of mid-nineteenth century history in music and dance. White displayed some remarkable fiddling and caller Gail Griffith skillfully guided novices through complicated and challenging dance steps.

A dozen conference participants attended Sunday’s religious service at Oakwood Street Presbyterian Church, the descendent of Henry Highland Garnet’s Liberty Street Presbyterian Church. They, other conference participants, and members of the congregation, gathered for lunch before embarking on a walking tour of two of Troy’s most significant Underground Railroad locations. Refreshments following the tour provided a pleasant conclusion to the conference weekend.

As at past conferences, we asked participants to provide feedback on their experience. Many

(Continued on page 4)
URHPCR Board of Directors

Paul Stewart, President: Co-Founder with Mary Liz Stewart of URHP – Manager of Training, Capital District Community Loan Fund; Community activist
Andrew Feffer, Vice President: Associate Professor of American History, Union College
William Bouchard, Treasurer: Senior Project Archeologist, Hartgen Archeological Associates
Erica Ball: Assistant Professor of American History and Africana Studies, Union College
Elizabeth Griffin: preservationists
Deborah Lafond: Africana Studies Bibliographer, University at Albany
Benita Law-Diao: NYS Public Health Nutritionist / Program Research Specialist
Vera Michelson: Community activist
Roy Pompey: Hudson Valley Community College Educator and Administrator
Richard Rugel: Financial Planner
Charles Touhey: Developer, Touhey Associates; community development activist
Al Wells: Community Re-investment Officer, Pioneer Bank
Wally Wheeler: Architectural Historian, Hartgen Archeological Associates

The Freedom Seeker is a publication of the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc., a non-profit corporation dedicated to promoting and encouraging knowledge and understanding of the 19th-century Underground Railroad Movement 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. Email at info@ugrworkshop.com

Myers Residence Update

We are pleased to report that in early March we were able to have engineer Ed Meade of Robert Silman Associates, P.C. visit the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence and evaluate it thoroughly. His final report will provide details on the extent of the structural problems as well as directions for their resolution. At this point it is estimated that the structural restoration of the Residence will cost $1,500,000.

A full-scale grant-writing campaign is now underway; at the same time we are planning a capital campaign and a public fund drive for the fall. We hope you will join with us to raise the funds needed to restore and preserve this national treasure.

Additionally, URHPCR has purchased from Albany city and county three nearby properties that will be part of a UGR campus. One of these properties was the residence of Albany Vigilance Committee member Dr. Thomas Elkins during 1850 - 1864. Volunteers are needed for clean-up, maintenance, and gardening at these properties. Contact us or join us for clean-up session - dates are listed in News and Notes.

Thank you to our conference donors and supporters

We would like to offer a note of thanks to financial supporters who helped make the February conference possible:

Benefactors ($1000):
♦ Albany District Chapter of the Links
♦ Archives Partnership Trust
♦ Dr. Sally Lawrence, VPAA, The Sage College
♦ Mr. Charles Touhey, Touhey Associates
♦ M&T Charitable Foundation

Sponsors ($500):
♦ Ms. Karen Hartgen, CEO, Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc.
♦ Schenectady Teacher Center

Supporters ($250):
♦ Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau
♦ Hon. David Paterson, NYS Senate

Contributors ($100):
♦ Albany County Historical Association
♦ Albany Public School Teachers Association
♦ Girl Friends, Inc., Albany Chapter
♦ Greater Capital Region Teachers Center
♦ Historical Society of the Town of Colonie
♦ Hon. Gerald Jennings, Mayor of Albany
♦ Hon. Kathleen Jimino, Rensselaer County Exec.
♦ Hon. Michael McNulty, US Congress
♦ Hon. Ron Canestrari, NYS Assembly
♦ Mr. Michael Murphy, Eastern NY Chapter, Fulbright Association
♦ Ms. Eleanor Baker
♦ Pioneer Savings Bank
♦ RPI – Institute Diversity
♦ Schenectady County Historical Society
♦ Troy’s RiverSpark Visitor Center

Thank you to all our Scholarship Sponsors
And of course, thanks to all who attended.
News and Notes

An Underground Railroad Tour, “Going to the Promised Land: A Canadian Adventure” will travel north on August 21-24. For more information on this exciting adventure, contact Debi Craig at dcrail1@nycap.rr.com

Welcome to new and renewed members: Lisa Anderson, Marey Bailey, Roseann Buchnel, Sharon Calhoun, Castellani Art Museum, Capital District Chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Judy Doesschate, Anthony Falco, Jean Forti, Historic Albany Foundation, Trudy Hutchinson, Suzanne Isaksen, Rebecca Johnson, Deborah LaFond, Joanna Patience, Billie Luisi Potts, Lucy Pagan, Virgia Phoenix, Louise Remick, Michael Rice & Sondra Spronkling, Jacqueline Robinson, Sheila Rorke, Cynthia Seacord, Joyce Lee Williams, Catherine Standford, Katherine Storms, Arthur Ware III, Judy Wellman

UGC Tours Have Started

Tours of underground railroad sites in downtown Albany began on March 19. Sunday walking tours depart at 2 pm from the Albany Heritage Area Visitors Center. Call 518-432-4432 for information. Remaining tour dates:
May 21, June 11, July 16, Aug 20, Sept 17, Oct 15

Check one:

□ Individual $ 25.00
□ Family 37.50
□ Contributing 50.00
□ Sustaining 75.00
□ Student 12.50
□ Institutional 25.00
□ Corporate 100.00

Name___________________________________________
Address_________________________________________
City___________________ State/Province _________
Zip/Postal Zone___________ Email _____________

Please make your check payable to URHPCR
Send with this form to the address below

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
people praised the conference as “fun,” “inspiring,” “enlightening,” and “exceptional.” Many also offered useful suggestions for future conferences. Among the improvements they proposed were lengthening each workshop, allowing more time between sessions, extending workshops over two days, and building in more time for networking. We will be considering these suggestions as we plan for the 2007 UGR history conference.

**SAVE THE DATE for the 6th annual UGR History Conference:** February 23, 24, 25, 2007 at the College of St. Rose, Albany, New York **UNDERGROUND RAILROAD: UNCOVERING THE VOICES OF WOMEN**