



# The Freedom Seeker

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Spring 2020

## Redlining in Albany's Arbor Hill Neighborhood

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A 2016 study by the Urban Institute and Brookings Institution found that the household wealth of a typical white family (\$171,000) was ten times that of a typical African American family (\$17,150). A major reason for this is the huge gap in homeownership between the two groups. About 74% of white families own their homes, whereas only 44% of black families do.

This disparity became part of federal policy during the Great Depression. As the Depression wore on, the construction industry ground to a halt. One of President Franklin Roosevelt's top priorities was jump starting housing construction. In 1934 he set up the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) which guaranteed bank mortgages—so long as the homes and borrowers met FHA's appraisal standards. This rejuvenated the housing construction industry and led to a vast increase in the rate of home ownership among white families, particularly after World War II. However, black families did not enjoy increased access to home ownership.

In the late 1930s FHA sent agents into about 250 cities around the country. They consulted with local realtors and

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bankers about the desirability and riskiness of neighborhoods. Together, they drew up maps that graded cities into four categories of risk: areas colored in green were the "best," blue areas were "still desirable," yellow areas were "definitely declining," and red areas were

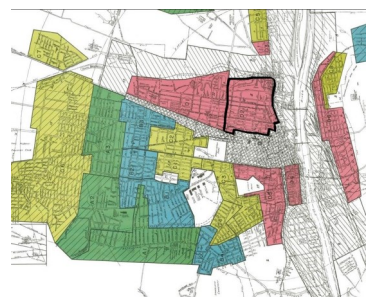
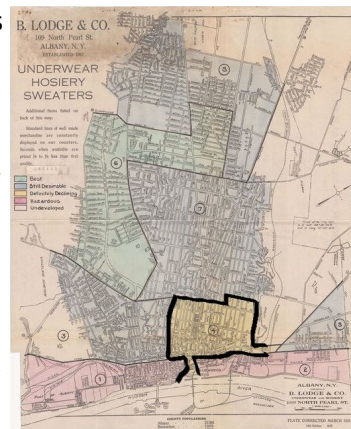
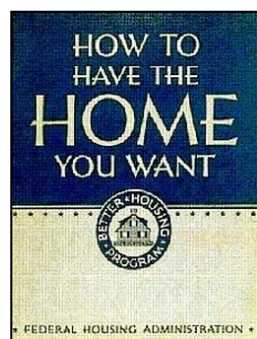
"hazardous." (The American Panorama site at University of Richmond has the redlining maps and neighborhood descriptions here: <https://bit.ly/3c8iUym> )

In Albany, local bankers and realtors met with federal officials twice. In 1936, they drew up a draft redlining map on a map given out to shoppers at Lodge's department store on N. Pearl St. (The map is here: <https://bit.ly/2y4XTpy>) The area where The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence is located was in area 4. They described the area as "largely old one to three family row houses inhabited by Poles, Irish and, on both Second and Third Streets, by Negroes....Because of the Negroes in the north and part-time occupancy by State employees in the south, this section is definitely declining."

In 1938 FHA and local bankers and realtors drew up a final version of Albany's redlining map. (The map is here: <https://bit.ly/2VgP3gg>) The Myers residence fell within area D2, described as: "some of the poorest streets in the city. Most of the city's Negro population reside in the northeastern portion of this section.

Many of the two-family houses now contain three units by use of the basement as a separate flat. Ten Broeck Street was once a very good residential street, but is now

(Cont'd p.4)





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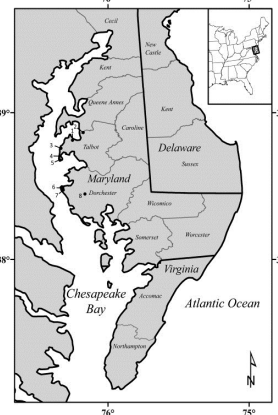
**Elizabeth Winslow**

The Freedom Seeker is a publication of Underground Railroad Education Center, 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 Underground Railroad Education Center, 194 Livingston Ave., Albany, NY 12210 or urhpcr@localnet.com.

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## Freedom Seeker Corner

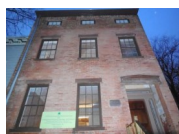
David Cate and his wife, whose name is unknown, sought assistance from Sydney Howard Gay and Louis Napoleon on March 25, 1856 when they arrived in New York City. Escaping his enslavement, David was joined by his free wife and they made their way on foot from Middletown, MD to Wilmington, DE, to Philadelphia, PA and finally to New York City, a trek of about 250 miles. Gay, as editor of the National Anti-Slavery Standard newspaper used the newspaper office as a sanctuary for Freedom Seekers.



Gay's *Record of Fugitives* was never published. The original *Record of Fugitives* is held at Columbia University. Two books that detail out the content of Gay's *Record* include ***Secret Lives of the Underground Railroad in New York City*** by Tom Calarco and Don Papson (2015) and ***Gateway to Freedom: the Hidden History of the Underground Railroad*** by Eric Foner (2015). The story continues to unfold.

## The Myers Residence and COVID-19

Paul Stewart, Scholar-in-Residence, Russell Sage College



Sanctuary. Shelter. Welcome. These concepts are built into the very walls of the Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence. From its days as a meeting place for Albany's Vigilance Committee in the 19th century, the house on Lumber Street (now Livingston Avenue) has been a place to connect with the kindness of strangers, to receive a helping hand, and the resources to attain freedom. And now we must close our doors. Not forever, thankfully, but still – it hurts.

COVID-19 – anyone can carry it. It's life-threatening for many. Evading it forces us to distance ourselves from each other, to eschew work, restaurants, movies, sporting events, and gatherings of any kind. This distancing is meant to help slow the spread of the virus, but it seems there is no clear sanctuary from its spread.

And here we are in Albany, NY, a Sanctuary City, one that offers fair justice to immigrants with the ideals of protection and welcome to people who have lost their homes due to war, terror or economic hardship. Now they find themselves in our city at a time when we are seeking sanctuary ourselves.

The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence holds up sanctuary as something to be honored and shared but it will be closed at least until the end of April so that staff, volunteers and

visitors can stay safe in the face of the threat of COVID-19.

Perhaps this is the lesson: sanctuary is found among people where there is caring, love and peace of circumstances. It is not found in a building unless those elements are present among the people who did and do inhabit the building. In this time of crisis, just as in Harriet and Stephen's time, what we need most is caring relationships. Without them, we are just an empty building.

Here is another opportunity to empathize with our ancestors. While we know how the history of enslavement in America played out, those held in bondage carried on without that assurance. We are all faced with considerable uncertainty now. We do not really know how long this crisis will last.

While we don't know what the future holds, we will continue to do our work. We'll be sharing resources with people who are hurting in our community, continuing to tell the true story of our nation's history, and continuing to strengthen and build so that we are ready to open our doors again as soon as we can.

The Myers Residence celebrates the people who escaped the dehumanizing horrors of enslavement and sought a safe place to find rest and refreshment in a space where love, care and peace prevailed. Let us continue to be a beacon of the sanctuary we all seek even now.

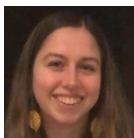
## Looking backward and looking forward with UREC

**October 2019** — 25 Regeneron employees volunteered 16 hours to build 19 new raised beds and a new shed on The Myers Residence Campus. An incredible gift!



**New Board Members**—UREC welcomes Kai Marion, Diversity and Compliance Coordinator for C&S Companies, and Elizabeth Winslow, Freelance Communications Strategist and Writer, who bring their talents and expertise to the Board of Trustees of UREC.

**Volunteers**—Nathaniel Hathaway, pursuing a career as a history teacher, along with Rachel Freeman, pursuing a degree in anthropology, are implementing a collections management system of the thousands of artifacts in the UREC collection under the expert guidance of anthropology graduate and volunteer Derek Healey.



**Mark your calendars—great things are on the horizon!**  
**Stay tuned for more details**

**LibertyCon 2020** is being rescheduled to the autumn of 2020 or February 2021

**July 4th Oration** will be conducted on July 4th either electronically or on-site—program will begin at 11am

**Young Abolitionist Leadership Institute 2020** is looking forward to its 10th summer! Please support this transformative teen program today at GoFundMe.com or by posting your donation to UREC, 194 Livingston Avenue, Albany, NY 12210

**International Archeology Day 2020** is planned for Saturday, October 17

**Induction of Stephen Myers** into the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum is scheduled for Saturday, October 24

**Black Awards Banquet 2020** is coming in early November

**5 Boros to Freedom**—May 16-23, 2021—new webpage coming listing NYC African American Experience sites and programs

## News and Notes

### Mission Statement of UREC

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.

### Changes are afoot — check them out —

- ◇ New website is up with updates continuing to be added
- ◇ New phone number is ready—518-621-7793
- ◇ New name—Underground Railroad Education Center

*In this time of great need, please remember Underground Railroad Education Center still NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT if we are to continue empowering others to carry on the work of our 19th century abolitionists to be agents of change working for a more equitable and just society for all.*

### SUBSCRIPTION DONATIONS and MEMBERSHIPS and ONE-TIME PAYMENT options

are available online at [UndergroundRailroadHistory.org](http://UndergroundRailroadHistory.org).

### 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 - 518-621-7793

## Stevie Wants You



**Welcome and thank you to our donors and to our new and renewing members:** Ron Ladouceur, Robert Alper, Carla Silverstein, Dianne & James Mathis, Donald Papson, David Hochfelder, Barbara DiTommaso, Johanna Steper, Karl Barbir, Stephen Kineke, Christina Cummings, Sandra Smith, Kenneth Claflin, Giovanni Salvo, Steven O'Connor, C&S Foundation, Mario Salerno, Judith Wing, Michael Myers, Jean Libby, David Easter, Mary Quigley, Twitty Styles, Darius Shahinfar, Anne B. King, Krispin's Automotive Repair, Lisa Barlow, Michael Barrett, Alice Bell-O'Neil, Deborah Tarrow, Barbara Counterman, Dennis & Gretchen Duling, Winifred Eisan, Thomas Fenlon, Sean Fisher, Darryl Freeman, Ron Gardner, David Goodrich, Worth Gretter, Susan Haswell, Lucinda Huggins, Mary Ellen Johnson, Eileen Kawola, Laura Lee, Martha & Leo Levy, Karen Lipson, Metra Lundy, Lynn Macgowan, Dr. Lawrence Marwill, Katie Meislahn, Ellen Mousin, Angela Neal, Sharon Robinson, Lynnea Salvo, Anne Savage, Margaret Snowden, Willie Terry, Barbara Traver, Brenda Twiggs, Frank Wicks, Diane Houselanger, Tara Cristalli, Peter Finn, Sheila Schneider, Susan Kastan, Deborah LaFond

*Thank You*



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## Redlining in Albany's Arbor Hill Neighborhood (cont'd from p.1)

entirely given over to rooming houses and small apartments; of questionable repute."



Although the practice of redlining has been illegal since the 1970s, it was accepted practice for two generations. Redlining made it much harder for families of color to buy homes in decent neighborhoods and to build family wealth through home ownership. And discriminatory lending still takes place. In 2019, giant mortgage lender Wells-Fargo settled a suit with the City of Philadelphia for \$10 million. The city found that the bank steered "African-American and Latino borrowers towards high-cost or high-risk loans even where those borrowers' credit permitted them to obtain more advantageous loans."



The legacy of the institution of slavery continues to plague us as a nation. The rights contained in the founding document of our nation have yet to be a reality for all Americans. Let us be inspired by the legacy of the Underground Railroad / Anti-slavery Movement to carry on in the footsteps of our communal ancestors as we work together today to create a just and equitable tomorrow.

*David Hochfelder, electrical engineer turned historian, specializes in the history of U.S. business and technology. He also is director of UAlbany's public history program. Before joining UAlbany, Hochfelder served as a research historian at the Thomas Edison Papers. He is the author of *The Telegraph in America, 1832-1920* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012). His next project will be a social history of savings and investment. He has appeared in two episodes of the History Channel's "Modern Marvels" series. (State University of New York at Albany website)*