



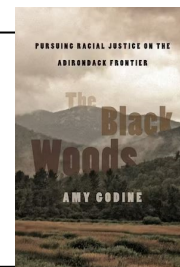
The Freedom Seeker

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Autumn - Winter 2023

The Black Woods - Pursuing Racial Justice on the Adirondack Frontier By Amy Godine, Independent Scholar

Amy Godine, Independent Scholar, has authored a book on the Black Pioneers in the Adirondacks in the years before the US Civil War. The book, *The Black Woods - Pursuing Racial Justice on the Adirondack Frontier*, is expected to be released by Cornell University Press in November 2023. She is speaking around the region promoting this book. Amy Godine is interviewed by Paul Stewart, staff of Underground Railroad Education Center.



Paul - I see that you have some great endorsements. I see Ken Burns, John Stauffer, Bill McKibbin and Nell Painter.

Amy - I got lucky with some blue-chip voices. I am very happy about that. They were so generous.

Paul - So, it's a story about the Black Pioneers in the Adirondacks?

Amy - It is that. It's about their experience on the ground, it's about the motives, the reasons that the benefactor gave the land to them in the first place, grounding it in their experience and his own abolitionism. It's also about how they made out on the frontier in their own lifetime and the lives of their descendants, and it follows the history of this episode in Adirondack history for another century as it is changed and distorted and undermined in the official record and ultimately unrecognizable. That's an exciting part of the story for me.

I am sure you have found this too, especially in your study of Myers, that historiography becomes a historical fact and

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influence in its own right and a kind of active player in the shaping of history. If you don't pay attention to how the history is told you're missing a big chunk of the history. That for me was a bit of a revelation and this takes up the last third of the book.

Paul - So, Gerrit Smith had this idea to circumvent the law in the State of New York which required Black's to have \$250 worth of property in order to vote. He donated property to a large number of individuals.

Amy - Three thousand Black New Yorkers from all over the state. I think he was hoping they would be overwhelmingly from New York City, but he couldn't find enough interested individuals in Metropolitan New York who met his stringent requirements for temperance. So, he had to move it farther afield and ultimately almost all counties in New York are represented. Which is fun for me because it means there's a link to even the smallest towns in the State. It's kind of wonderful.

Paul - What were the requirements Smith asked for?

Amy - Poverty was not so stringent, everybody was poor. And landlessness too was a common feature of Black life. I don't think his land agents, White or Black, were expecting the resistance to his temperance clause that they found when they were seeking takers for this land for deeds. I think a number of Black men who were solicited by the agents resented having their lifestyles condemned and determined. Whether or not they were interested in drinking, they were interested in making the decision for themselves about whether they would drink and not having the decision to drink or not drink dictated by these terms. That cost him some good will among poor Black working people, working men.

(cont'd on page 4)

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Freedom Seekers and Their Allies

Mary Ann Shadd Cary, born in 1823, grew up in a Black abolitionist family in Delaware and with the family moved to Pennsylvania in 1833, and then to Toronto, Ontario, Canada following the passage of the 1850 Federal Fugitive Slave Law. While in Toronto she opened a school for Black and White students, she wrote and lectured about the importance of freedom while she was living in Canada, and she became the first Black, female newspaper editor in North American history when she published Canada's first antislavery newspaper, *The Provincial Freeman*.



Following the outbreak of the US Civil War Cary returned to the U.S. to help recruit soldiers for the Union Army. After the war she enrolled in the first class of Howard University Law School and taught local children during the day, continuing her activism in a variety of ways, including joining the women's suffrage movement. Cary led an impactful life that was brought to an end in 1893. A woman who inspires us today!

Follow Underground Railroad Education Center on Facebook for more Freedom Seeker Friday accounts

The Freedom Seeker is a publication of Underground Railroad Education Center, a non-profit corporation dedicated to researching and preserving the local and national history of the Underground Railroad movement, its international connections, and its legacy for today's social justice issues, thereby empowering people of all ages to be agents of change toward an equitable and just society.

Editorial inquiries can be sent to Underground Railroad Education Center, 194 Livingston Avenue, Albany, NY 12210 or urhpcr@localnet.com

This newsletter is printed by Modern Press

December Dash 2023 has Arrived! Together we can do this!

UREC is at it again - inviting you to join with others in support of the transformational work of UREC that is rooted in the empowering stories of our Black abolitionists and freedom seekers. Let us walk in their footsteps and continue to be agents of change toward equity and justice in our world today. Together we can:



- prepare our teens to be leaders for tomorrow,
- educate to bring about equity and justice in our world,
- preserve and celebrate the voices and spaces of Black Americans written out of the American Narrative,
- engage the past with our present and look to the future with justice as our standard



Donate today - **online** at undergroundrailroadhistory.org/donate/
- via **postal mail** using the enclosed envelope

Feel free to designate, if so inclined, where you would like your donation to be directed

Together let's dash to the end of December 2023 with a goal of raising more than the \$45,000 you helped to raise in December Dash 2022



"The time is always right to do what is right." - Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Looking Backward and Looking Forward with UREC

INTERPRETIVE CENTER (IC) fundraising proceeds full steam ahead! House Parties, Pledges, and Timber Sponsorships, as well as grants and donations help the project to move forward. A deep bucket to fill, but worth the effort as having the IC will allow UREC to host programs that are currently only dreams, collaborate with other institutions, host workforce development training, employ community members, and share both the UGRR and IC environmental features story in so many creative ways. Learn more at undergroundrailroadhistory.org/interpretive-center-description/

DRAWN TO ART WITH MARCUS KWAME is hosted every third Friday at The Myers Residence. Designed for beginners to experienced, it's a great opportunity for learning and refining art skills while connecting with others. Details can be found on the UREC website events calendar.

UREC READS continues to work its way through Ibram X. Kendi's *How to be an Antiracist*. Held on the second Friday of each month via Zoom, reflective conversation enriches and challenges and poses new ideas. Details are on the UREC website events calendar.

FREEDOMCON 2024 is set to begin on Saturday, January 20

via Zoom. Details about presentation topics, registration and zoom links will be available on the UREC website in the first week of January. See you there!

MAKE YOUR PURCHASES AT TARGET from January 1 through March 31, 2024. UREC has been invited to participate in the Target Circle Community Giving Program. In order to cast votes for UREC when making purchases in-store and online, voters need to be a member of Target Circle. Details about being a Target Circle member can be found in stores and online via the Target app or at www.target.com/circle. Thank you in advance for your support through the TARGET CIRCLE GIVING PROGRAM.

MOVIE NIGHT and GAME NIGHT are coming to The Myers Residence on the first and fourth Fridays of each month beginning in February 2024. Details will be available on the UREC website events calendar. Stay tuned!

TOUR EXPERIENCES at The Myers Residence continue to attract local residents and visitors from around NYS, the nation, and from international locations. Sharing the voices and experience of Black abolitionists and freedom seekers is changing the UGRR paradigm. Pay a visit when in town!

News and Notes



UREC MISSION STATEMENT

Underground Railroad Education Center researches and preserves the local and national history of the Underground Railroad movement, its international connections, and its legacy for today's social justice issues, thereby empowering people of all ages to be agents of change toward an equitable and just society.

LEAVE A LEGACY with UREC - Maximize your tax deductions through charitable giving by leveraging one of many planned giving opportunities. For more information call Mary Liz Stewart at 518-621-7793.



To New and Renewing Members: Aimee M. Allaud, Alan Levin, Albany County Historical Association, Analine S. Hicks, Angela Neal, Anne C. Savage, AnnMarie Hess, Anonymous, Austerlitz Historical Society, Bonnie Terry, David Esmond, David Hochfelder, Diane Houslanger, Elaine Benton, Jacqueline Schmitt, Leroy & Brenda Twigg, Lillie McLaughlin, Lynda Karig Hohmann, Margaret Snowden, Martha & Leo Levy, Mary Kadlecek, Miel Fajen, Museum Hue, Nolan Cool, Pamela Kostbar-Jarvis, Paul Carlsen, Paula Brewer, Schoharie County Home of Ongoing Learning, Sharon Calhoun, Steven & Diane O'Connor, Susan McCormick, Susan Penn, Watervliet City School District, William Foehrenbach, Winifred Eisan, Yvonne Abunaw

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"We may encounter many defeats but we must not be defeated."

Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

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The Black Woods - Pursuing Racial Justice on the Adirondack Frontier *(cont'd from p.1)*

Paul - Along the way, there was a controversy about whether to be given land or to buy land. How does that figure in?

Amy - Well, that's a different story. That has to do with the several what I call copy-cat initiatives, that follow in the wake of Gerrit Smith's initiative when Black reformers take his idea and reshape it to suit their own interests. All of them are interested in buying Smith's land. He has an enormous amount of land on tap at this time, independent of this give-away, and he is advertising in anti-slavery newspapers. The word is out that there's land to be had for not much money by the Abolitionist Gerrit Smith in Northern New York. He's approached by four land groups, all of whom want significant swaths of land in St. Lawrence County in northern New York and in western New York. The only one that comes to anything is Stephen Myers' idea for land in the township of Florence in Oneida County. He is the only one that puts bodies on the land. He gets land from Gerrit Smith. He starts with his own deed of land for 40 acres, breaks that into pieces, and finds other Albanians who also got land as gifts who also bust up their land into lots, and they determined that Pioneers might not need the full 40-acre lot, that they can make do with 5 or 10 acres when they have other employment in the neighborhood. This was Myers' hope. He was thinking of a mixed diversified community, not strictly a farming community.

Paul - Look for Amy's book this November. It adds to our knowledge of this period. The Black Pioneers became voters but also landowners and secured independence - the right to have a home, to not rent, and to make their way on their own land.

Ordering options are available at <https://www.amygodine.com/the-black-woods> or by calling your local bookstore. Join Amy at FreedomCon 2024 on Saturday, February from 2pm-3pm via zoom to learn more about the Black experience in the Adirondacks.