



The Freedom Seeker

Harriet Myers, Woman of Distinction

By Paul Stewart

While on the one hand many people tell and repeat the stories of Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth, there are a great many other Black women who did critical work in the Underground Railroad period whose work and efforts are largely overlooked. One such person is Harriet Myers.

In every way the work of Harriet Myers was important to the success of the Underground Railroad movement and the broader Civil Rights efforts for Black Americans. When one gets a look at what she did in her life both by herself and in concert with her husband Stephen one cannot but be impressed. She was a local woman to Albany. She lived in many places in our community on Third Street, Lark Street and Lumber Street, today's Livingston Avenue. She worked in concert with other women of her time. Some of her efforts have been celebrated in print in newspapers of the period and from these newspapers we can tell her story.

Harriet Myers was born in 1805 and we know her father was Abram Johnson. She had at least one brother, John Johnson. We know that Abram Johnson and John Johnson purchased a sloop in Troy in 1833. Operating a Hudson River sloop, a specialized boat designed for work on the Hudson, they transported building materials, agricultural products, and sometimes people

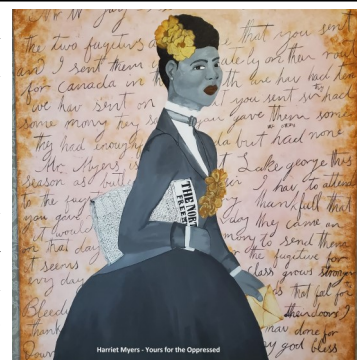
as passengers. Because of this work it seems the Johnson's had connections up and down the river from Albany to New York City. As the daughter of a businessman Harriet had the opportunity to take advantage of the connections related to

this business making her a bit more cosmopolitan than some of her peers.

Along the way growing up Harriet learned to read and write and was known as a bright student even later in life. Her obituary describes her as a "faithful student" in her life. She was known

as a reader of books. We also know about her character as a person from some of the newspaper articles about her. In her obituary published in at least two sources, *The Christian Recorder* of September 2, 1865 published out of Philadelphia, and *The San Francisco Elevator* of August 19, 1865 she is described as "an affectionate wife, a good neighbor, an indulgent mother and a warm and trusty friend". She is also described as "an active and energetic anti-slavery woman", and "her house was ever a shelter for the oppressed and the friendless". From another newspaper article in the *Albany Morning Express* of 1870 we learn that, "... as many as a dozen fugitive slaves often stayed with the Myers family at a time."

Stephen Myers and Harriet Johnson married in 1827 in Troy, New York just a couple of months before the general emancipation in New York ended enslavement for most enslaved people who resided in New York State. In those early days of marriage, we know that Stephen Myers participated with the Clarkson Anti-Slavery Society that was based at the African Baptist Church pastored by Rev. Nathaniel Paul and so it is likely that Stephen and Harriet attended there. Later, we know that Stephen was involved with (cont'd p.4)



Painting by D. Collin

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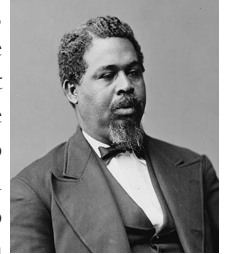
The Freedom Seeker is a publication of Underground Railroad Education Center, a non-profit corporation dedicated to researching and preserving the local and national history of the Underground Railroad movement, its international connections, and its legacy for today's social justice issues, thereby 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

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Freedom Seekers and Their Allies

Robert Smalls was the son of Lydia Polite, and lived in a small slave cabin behind the home of Henry McKee at 511 Prince Street in Beaufort, South Carolina. McKee enslaved both Smalls and his mother, who served in the house in Beaufort. When Smalls was 12 years old McKee sent him to Charleston to be hired out. He worked as a waiter in a hotel before eventually hiring out in the city's docks.



By the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, Robert Smalls was an enslaved crewmember on a ship called the Planter, operating in the Charleston Harbor. The owners of the ship contracted the vessel out to the Confederate army as a transport ship, and Smalls found himself as a pilot on board the ship. In early 1862, the Confederacy had achieved numerous battlefield victories, and it seemed as if the quest to create an independent slaveholders' republic might succeed. Robert Smalls decided not to wait and find out. He devised a plan to free not only himself, but his family as well.

To find out what happened, follow this National Park Service link www.nps.gov/people/robert-smalls.htm - a great story awaits you!

THANK YOU!

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Looking Backward and Looking Forward with UREC



DRAWN TO ART WITH MARCUS 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.

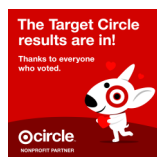
UREC READS will be moving in June to the 4th Wednesday of each month. It will continue to meet virtually. Details will continue to be posted on the UREC website events calendar.

MYERS MERCANTILE calls you to make your purchases online at undergroundrailroadhistory.org/myers-mercantile/

FREEDOMCON 2024 continues on the 4th Saturday of each month via zoom. CRT, Rapp Road Community, Hope Chapel, and Cataract House are a sample of presentations still to come. Details are accessible through the UREC website homepage (www.undergroundrailroadhistory.org)



GAME NIGHTS are coming to The Myers Residence on the 4th Fridays beginning in June. Details will be available on the UREC website events calendar. Hope to see you there!



TARGET CIRCLE COMMUNITY GIVING program brought in 78,308 votes for UREC which translated into \$2,608.81 donated to UREC. THANK YOU to those of you who cast your votes!

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



JUNETEENTH is scheduled for Saturday, June 15 from 12noon-4pm. Rapp Road Community, Wizard's Wardrobe, Capital Rep Theatre, Office of the State Comptroller, The Camaroonian Chorus, and Nick Payton's AI music performance, among others, plan to be with us. A children's space will also be available. Join us!

JULY 4th ORATION is scheduled for Thursday, July 4 from 11am-1pm in the backyard of The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence - rain or shine. Lunch to follow.

News and Notes



Stevie Wants You to Know



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 to 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.



TIMBER SPONSORSHIPS for the Interpretive Center start at \$250. Can your family, your church, your reading group become a sponsor? Information can be accessed via the UREC website homepage or by calling Mary Liz Stewart at 518-621-7793.



"It's not the load that breaks you down; it's the way you carry it."

Lena Horne (1917-2010)

Introducing Lacey Wilson, UREC's new staff member who is the Museum Studies Teen Program Project Manager. Lacey comes to UREC with a background in Public History and community engagement, emphasizing bringing the stories and voices of marginalized people to the forefront. Welcome, Lacey!



The **Ground Breaking for the Interpretive Center** that was held on Earth Day was a smashing success! Videos from the event are available for viewing on the Underground Railroad Education Center YouTube page - click on Playlists - enjoy the seven interview videos and the 45 minute Ground Breaking Ceremony video. Also check out the Interpretive Center videos located on the Hamlin Design Group YouTube page.

Young Abolitionist Leadership Institute is getting ready for the summer 2024 program. This year our teens will focus on learning the history related to The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence and translating that history into a video recording and guided tour experience that they can offer to the public. Stay tuned for further developments.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD EDUCATION CENTER

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Harriet Myers, Woman of Distinction *(cont'd from p.1)*

the African Methodist Episcopal Church on Hamilton Street and, given his further association with the church, it is fair to assume they attended there in the 1840s. Harriet was also an active woman in ladies' groups that provided for the community. Her involvement in the Colored Ladies Lincoln Society was occasionally noted in the newspapers with their support of the Army Bazaar charitable efforts for wounded Union soldiers during the Civil War. The efforts of this group were consistent with how Harriet was known throughout her life as a person of compassion and charitable work.

The letter Harriet is known to have written to William John Jay in 1860 documents, as a firsthand narrative and primary source, her involvement in providing assistance to those fleeing enslavement as they came through Albany, and to her being known as a very attentive host in providing shelter and help to those considered "passengers" on the Underground Railroad.

Harriet passed away in 1865 and, as her obituary points out, was apparently enjoying good health up to her last where she was stricken in the street and passed away shortly thereafter. She was approximately 60 years of age. She had five children - Elizabeth, Abram, Catherine, Harriet and Stephen, Jr. Only Stephen, Jr. and his wife Julia Lawrence had children. They had five descendants.

Harriet's life is a story that should not be overlooked or forgotten. While we have limited information about her, what we do have has yielded a rich picture of an activist and compassionate helper who put her life at the service of justice and caring.