



Underground Railroad Free Press®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

urrfreepress.com

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Volume 3, Issue 1

Free Press Prize Criteria Set, Judges Empanelled



Bordewich



Frost



Hall



Palmer



Switala



Simmons



Young

Call for Nominations

Underground Railroad Free Press encourages interested parties to submit nominations for the 2008 *Underground Railroad Free Press* Prizes.

Please visit our web site at urrfreepress.com to download nomination forms and instructions or for more information on the prizes. Nominations may be completed only on these forms and are submitted via email.

Anyone may submit a nomination at any time. Those submitted before April 1 will be considered for the 2008 Prizes while those submitted later will be considered for the 2009 prizes. Prizes are not awarded posthumously.

Nominees should not be made aware that they are being nominated, nor should nominators or others contact Prize judges. Questions should be directed to publisher@urrfreepress.com.

Except for the three Prize winners, names of nominees are not revealed by *Underground Railroad Free Press*, judges or others associated with the prizes.

Winners of the three 2008 prizes will be announced by *Underground Railroad Free Press* and prizes awarded in the Fall.

We are delighted to honor the Underground Railroad community with the *Underground Railroad Free Press* Prizes, especially those involved with the contemporary Underground Railroad who have made the largest contributions in rekindling the memory of this noble institution.

We look forward to receiving the nominations for the 2008 prizes.

Free Press has inaugurated three annual prizes for outstanding contributions to contemporary Underground Railroad work and will first award the prizes in 2008.

A call for nominations for the prizes goes out with this issue of *Free Press*. Prize winners will be announced by *Free Press* in Fall 2008 and the winners' prizes and achievements publicized to the North American press.

The Underground Railroad Free Press Prize for Leadership recognizes outstanding individual leadership of a contemporary Underground Railroad entity or cause, or leadership within the Underground Railroad community as a whole.

The Underground Railroad Free Press Prize for Preservation is awarded to an individual, entity or group which has caused a significant restoration of an Underground Railroad safe-house or route, newly identified an important Underground Railroad site or sites, significantly promoted Underground Railroad site preservation or advanced methods of site preservation.

The Underground Railroad Free Press Prize for the Advancement of Knowledge is awarded to an individual, entity or group which has made a significant addition to Underground Railroad knowledge and may be awarded for a single work such as a landmark publication, or a body of work, or the arts, or creating or advancing a collection.

Criteria for awarding each prize have been established and the *Underground Railroad Free Press* Prize Panel of Judges seated. *Free Press* is honored to have the following international group of distinguished experts serve as the Prizes' founding Panel of Judges.

Fergus Bordewich

Mr. Bordewich authored the highly acclaimed *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America*, and is completing a book on the use of slavery in constructing the United States Capitol.

Karolyn Smarkz Frost

Dr. Frost, Executive Director of the Ontario Historical Society, Ontario, Canada, authored

I've Got a Home In Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad named Canada's best nonfiction book of 2007. (See page two.) An archeologist, she has served as Canada's representative to the World Archaeological Congress.

Lawrence Hall

Canadian broadcast and print journalist Lawrence Hall descends from two Underground Railroad freedom seekers who fled the United States to Canada. He writes and lectures on black history, freedom seekers and the Underground Railroad in Canada.

Hon. Ronald Palmer

Formerly United States Ambassador to Malaysia, Mauritius and Togo, Ambassador Palmer teaches international affairs at George Washington University and is an accomplished Underground Railroad researcher. A Fulbright Scholar, he sits on the board of the National Fulbright Association.

Hortense Simmons

Dr. Simmons, a multiple Fulbright Scholar to Malaysia and Ukraine, sits on the board of Friends of the Underground Railroad, and is Professor Emerita of English Literature at California State University, Sacramento. A sought-after speaker, she teaches and lectures worldwide on African-American issues.

William Switala

Dr. Switala, recently retired from Duquesne University, has authored three books extensively cataloguing Underground Railroad sites in six eastern states. His books have probably listed more Underground Railroad sites than any other source, and he is now working on an update to his book on Pennsylvania's sites. Dr. Switala took his Ph.D. in the classics and has performed research in ten languages.

Wayne Young

Mr. Young is publisher of *Port of Harlem*, a nationally distributed features magazine on contemporary African-American life. Based in Washington, DC, *Port of Harlem* has featured articles on the contemporary Underground Railroad. Visit the magazine's web site at portofharlem.net.

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Free Press Prize Nominations

Visit urrfreepress.com/#Prizes to learn more about these annual prizes and to download a nomination form

Smithsonian Launches Federal Underground Railroad Program

The Smithsonian Institution, the "nation's museum", plans to launch a federal government Underground Railroad program to be hosted by the new National Museum of African-American History and Culture. The new Museum will be housed in a building to be constructed on the National Mall in Washington, DC. The target date for completion of Museum construction is December, 2015.

A Smithsonian spokeswoman states that the story of the Underground Railroad will be featured prominently in Museum exhibits, re-

sources and outreach. The Museum has already begun collecting Underground Railroad oral histories in its Memory Book feature.

The Smithsonian's spokeswoman was silent on how the Museum's Underground Railroad program might relate with the National Park Service's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program. The Museum will be the second to prominently feature the Underground Railroad, the first being Cincinnati's privately operated National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.

Frost Underground Railroad Book Awarded Top Literary Prize

Karolyn Smardz Frost's landmark biography, *I've Got a Home In Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*, has been awarded the 2007 Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction, Canada's top literary award. Frost is a judge on the *Underground Railroad Free Press* Prize Panel of Judges and Executive Director of the Ontario Historical Society.

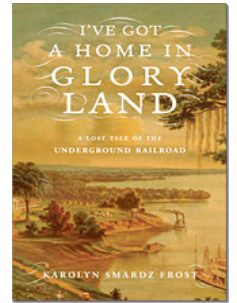
I've Got a Home In Glory Land tells the story of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, freedom seekers who fled Kentucky to Detroit and then Canada. The Blackburns were the focus of the Detroit Riots of 1833 when black townspeople sprang the two from jail after they had been arrested on the say-so of a slave catcher.

The two fled to Canada where they became the objects of two international extradition attempts, the result of which was Canada's

first refusal to return freedom seekers to the United States. By 1831, the Governor General of Canada, on his own, had outlawed slavery in Canada as did Great Britain officially for all of her colonies including Canada by 1833.

The Blackburns lived peacefully in Toronto for the rest of their lives where Thornton Blackburn founded the city's first taxi company. Karolyn Frost, an archeologist, first came upon the Blackburn's story when excavating their home site in Toronto in the 1980s, and spent the next 20 years researching this book.

Editor's note: This deeply engrossing book is a wonderful read.



Oral Tradition Saves New York Underground Railroad Homes

The City of New York has cancelled its plans to condemn and take by eminent domain a series of six homes on the Brooklyn Borough's Duffield Street to make room for a parking garage as part of a large private high-rise development of the area. The homes and neighborhood had been active in the Underground Railroad and abolitionism.

The focus of the fight was activist Joy Chatel's home at 227 Duffield Street which had been owned by abolitionists Harriet and Thomas Truesdell. While the Truesdells' abolitionist work was documented, use of their 1848 home as an Underground Railroad safe-house was not and that was enough for the City and its historical research vendor, AKRF, Inc., to recommend demolition of the home.

A growing list of community organizations and elected officials saw that AKRF's recommendation was too convenient to its City client, and lined up behind the homeowners' argument that most of what transpired in the Underground Railroad dared not be documented because of the risks in doing so, and that solid oral tradition, as in the case of the Duffield Street homes, must be respected.

Ms. Chatel, Lewis Greenstein and other owners learned of their homes' Underground Rail-

road roles through such oral traditions passed down from property owner to property owner to them. Such oral traditions are the overwhelming source of what is known today about the Underground Railroad. Mr. Greenstein also discovered a tunnel connecting the homes.

In settlement of a lawsuit filed by Ms. Chatel and Families United for Racial and Economic Equality, the City pledged on December 1 that it will not use eminent domain to condemn the homes. Said Jennifer Levy, attorney for the homeowners, "I commend the City for [its] flexibility. [It has] shown that it is possible to do development thoughtfully, in a manner responsive to community concerns, and with an eye to preserving our history."

Said Chatel, "My vision is to continue the Cultural Center and Museum my daughter and I started years ago." Tours of the museum located in Chatel home are by request.

Free Press supported preservation of the Duffield Street homes editorially and with an *amicus* court statement, and has editorialized for stronger emphasis on use of oral traditions in recognizing and officially listing Underground Railroad sites.

Underground Railroad Free Press® Independent Reporting On Today's Underground Railroad

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