



## Editorial

### Hit the Road for Underground Railroad Heritage Tourism

Ask Kitty Pope or Lou Fields where to take your next vacation and the answer is likely to be, "Into your past."

Pope is president of AfricanDiaspora-Tourism.com and Executive Director of the International Association of Black Travel Writers. Fields founded Baltimore Black Heritage Tours. They and a growing number of others have keyed in on Americans' growing discovery that exploring one's ancestry is a great way to spend a vacation.



Pope



Fields

While Pope and Fields can arrange a tour or actually lead you on one, some states and localities have put together their own Underground Railroad, African-American, Civil War or other tours. Kansas, Indiana, Louisiana and New York might be the best.

The private sector is also getting into the act with more and more safe-houses now announcing tours on the Internet, usually at no charge.

For the international traveler, Pope's AfricanDiasporaTourism.com offers a range of historic African destinations. Fields (mysite.verizon.net/vze1ta3t/bbhtour) conducts tours of the Baltimore waterfront where Frederick Douglass made his break for freedom.

Planning a vacation? Consider looking over your shoulder for your heritage.

We've run several articles on the battle that neighbors and New York City have waged against a developer who is illegally modifying Hopper-Gibbons House. Isaac Hopper and Abigail Gibbons, father-daughter abolitionists, fled across roof tops from the home in the New York Draft Riots of 1863.

Fern Luskin and Julie Finch were awarded the 2009 Free Press Preser-

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# Underground Railroad Free Press®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

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## Economy Brightens for Underground Railroad Programs

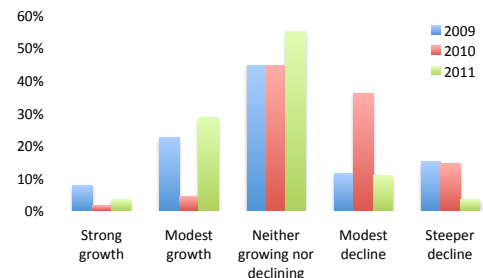
Results from the 2011 *Underground Railroad Free Press* survey of the international underground railroad community indicate that Underground Railroad program financing rebounded nicely in 2010 after taking a beating during the Great Recession of 2008-2009.

Last year's survey, which asked about 2009 revenue changes, showed average program revenue dropping a third from 2008. In 2009 fewer than half of Underground Railroad organizations had any revenue at all.

From the 2010 survey, a third of programs are now growing again. As in the chart here, the rebound shows many organizations swinging from contraction to growth.

While half of Underground Railroad programs contracted in 2009, only one in seven shrank in 2010. The proportion growing grew from 6 to 32 percent from 2009 to 2010.

Revenue Growth Patterns, 2009-2011



## 2011 Survey: Underground Railroad Interest Going Public

Results from the 2011 *Underground Railroad Free Press* survey of the international underground railroad community reveal that interest in the Underground Railroad continues to move beyond the core few thousand closely involved with Underground Railroad sites and programs and into the general public.

Barely half of 2011 survey respondents report direct involvement with an Underground Railroad site or program, down from previous surveys as more members of the general public participate in the surveys. The 2011 survey shows demographics of newcomers and long-timers to be similar, with age, gender, title level and employment sector having changed little since 2007. The typical respondent has been involved with the Underground Railroad for about a decade, but pub-

lic respondents, less than a year on average.

The community is also becoming more international with *Free Press* readers from Canada, Ukraine, the Bahamas and England.

*Free Press*, the Network to Freedom and the Freedom Center remain as the most familiar Underground Railroad institutions. These, the two other federal Underground Railroad programs, and Yale's Gilder-Lehrman Center now comprise the top tier of importance to the Underground Railroad community.

One emailed notice of a *Free Press* issue results in five readers. Teachers, public-sector officials, writers and researchers are the most frequent *Free Press* readers.

Visit our website for the full survey report.

## Old Ways Ebb As Douglass Memorial Goes Up

It was on the steps of the county courthouse in Easton, Maryland, where Frederick Douglass in 1878 delivered his lastingly renowned "self-made men" speech. And it was on the courthouse lawn where not long afterward a memorial was erected to the County's men who had served the Confederacy in the Civil War. The county never saw fit to erect a memorial to its Union soldiers.

After more than a century of resistance, Talbot County crossed a long-sought threshold on June 18 when 2,000 people including Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley attended the dedication on that courthouse lawn of a statue of its most famous son, Frederick Douglass. Easton historical district signs now proudly beckon with, "Douglass Returns."

Said Eric Lowery who spearheaded the recognition, "I think it shows how this community

changed from a time when black people weren't allowed to even be on the courthouse lawn, truly a community project."



Douglass, born enslaved in 1818 nine miles from Easton, escaped from the Baltimore docks, wrote his autobiography in 1845, became one of the nation's leading abolitionists, influenced Lincoln, and attained international distinction in his own lifetime.

vation Prize for their work contesting the developer. Luskin is featured in a recent television episode of *Secrets of New York* on the flight of Hopper and Gibbons. View the program at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nycmg/nycctvod/html/home/sony403.html>. To get directly to Luskin's segment, mouse-over on the video and slide the timer to 13 minutes.

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## African Letter's Long Path to Michigan Rediscovery

The Beckmaze Historical Society of Wyoming, Michigan, has identified a home once used as the owners' residence of an accompanying lumber mill as an Underground Railroad safe-house. A local benefactor plans to donate funds to acquire the site for the Society.

Kelly White, a member of the Wyoming Historical Commission, has studied the property and believes she is on the verge of proving that the home was indeed an Underground Railroad stop. If White's work yields proof, the home will be among the three to four percent of Underground Railroad site claims nationwide with conclusive documentation. The Beckmaze Historical Society hopes to occupy the property and begin restoration soon.

The home sits on Buck Creek which powered the mill and leads to Lake Michigan. The mill was built in 1834 for John Wright. When he passed away, his son Timothy relocated from Chicago to maintain the operation which milled white pine from local woods for the building of Chicago in the city's early days. When Timothy Wright was recalled to Chicago

to tend to family matters, his cousin Egbert Dewey took over the mill, and purchased it, the home and land once owned by his uncle.



Before coming to Michigan, Dewey lived in Quincy, Illinois, where he had witnessed the capture, re-enslavement and return of escaped slaves. His abhorrence of what he witnessed was in part inherited from his father's leadership of the first anti-slavery society at Massachusetts' Williams College. After his move to Michigan, Dewey undertook

*Please see Letter, page 3, column 1*

## Student Curiosity Uncovers New York Rediscovery

Carl Ballenas, an elementary school history teacher and volunteer historian at Maple Grove Cemetery in New York City, knew his students were on to something.

At a Maple Grove Cemetery event, Ballenas's honor students asked about the wording on a monument, "Removals from Church Vaults at the Corner of Prince and Marion Streets, New York. February 1877," asking what "removals" meant. Ballenas explained that apparently a church had removed remains from its cemetery and had them reinterred at Maple Grove in 1877. Ballenas makes his living sparking students' curiosity but this time they had turned the tables on him.

Studying the location mentioned in the inscription, he found the church to be historic Shiloh Church in Manhattan. Ballenas writes that the First Colored Presbyterian Church was established in 1822 by Samuel E. Cornish at a house on Rose Street between Frankfort and Pearl Streets. A brick church building was built at 119 Elm, now Lafayette Street, at the corner of Canal Street in 1824. When the growth of the congregation required a

larger building, the German Lutheran Church at the northeast corner of Frankfort and William Streets was purchased and used until 1848. The congregation next relocated to the church to 61 Prince Street at the corner of Marion, now Centre Street, vacated by the Union Church which had dissolved a few years before. The Presbyterian Church then listed this church with dual names as Prince Street Church and Shiloh Church.

As its congregation dwindled in number, the building was sold in 1877 when those interred there were removed to Maple Grove. Mr. Ballenas confirmed the reinterment to Maple Grove Cemetery from its *Internment Book for 1877*: "Note - Int. 29 - 308 removals from the Presbyt. Ch. Vault New York City, corner of Prince and Marion St."

Shiloh Church had more than its share of illustrious pastors. Its first, Rev. Samuel Eli Cornish, born free in Delaware in 1795, moved to New York City in 1821, and organized the New Demeter Street Presbyterian Church, the city's first black Presbyterian

*Please see Students, page 3, column 2*

## Survey Takers: "Move and Expand National Statuary Hall"

Recently *Free Press* reported on an ill-fated attempt in the Maryland General Assembly to ask Congress for permission to place a Harriet Tubman statue in National Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol by removing the John Hanson statue already there.

Hanson was the first president of the nation's original government under the Articles of Confederation. Both he and Tubman were Marylanders. After a major political tussle

which spilled into the press, the Maryland Senate voted unanimously to seek other means for Tubman's entry into the Hall.

Respondents to the 2011 *Free Press* Survey feel the same way. Only 12 percent favor entry at the expense of another statue. Expansion of National Statuary Hall is favored by 77 percent of respondents, and moving the National Statuary Hall Collection to a more accessible site in Washington by 86 percent.

## Letter

a major renovation of the mill during which White says Dewey disguised the construction of an underground passage leading from a nearby dam to a hidden room in the house which was restored at the same time. White's and others' research points to the Dewey family having harbored runaways through much of the 1850s until the end of the Civil War.

Dewey family memorabilia which might provide first-hand confirmation of the family's Underground Railroad involvement remains unknown, but the circumstantial evidence of the home's and mill's Underground Railroad role is strong.

The Ford family, who purchased the Deweys' home, was aware of its Underground Railroad history. In the 1920s, Mr. Ford gave a tour of the home to a group of friends, one of whom, now in her 90s, recently confirmed that Ford showed her the hidden room, revealing it as a refuge for runaway slaves.

Ford covered the hideaway's entrance so that, in his view, it would be preserved. Leading to the secret room was the tunnel entrance near the Buck Creek dam which had been let loose in the 1880s. When he sealed the room, Ford also covered up this far entrance which remains sealed. Ms. White has determined that at least a portion of the tunnel remains intact, but suspects that one section may have collapsed, and plans an inspection after gaining full access to the property.

The property's next owner, the Ford family's physician, uncovered the entrance to the room to inspect it himself. As his family had been in the area for many years since before the Civil War, the physician-owner also had heard growing up that the home and its hideaway had been used to harbor freedom seekers.

Upon the physician's death, the home was sold to a charitable group which used it as a home for troubled boys. In the 1980s, the boys' home director became one more of the property's owners interested in its history which had begun to be forgotten. When inspecting the attic, he found photo albums of the Dewey family from the 1880s, the Ford family in the 1890s, and the Wedgwood family, the last owners before the home was repurposed into the boys' home.

It is the boys' home director who provided the most tantalizing evidence of the home's Underground Railroad use. In 1984, the director had a visitor from a university in Georgia. The caller had received a letter from a man in Africa inquiring about his own heritage. An an-

cestor of the African correspondent was an American runaway slave who had made it all the way back to Africa and immortalized his journey in writing as a legacy for his descendants. He described his route through Michigan including several stops, three of them in Kent County where Wyoming is located.

The first safehouse described by the epic traveler was a home near Wyoming's 92<sup>nd</sup> Street and Division Avenue which has been claimed as an Underground Railroad site. This home also has a secret room and underground passage leading to it, and is situated on a feeder creek running into Buck Creek which had powered the nearby Wright-Dewey Mill. The freedom seeker's written account stated that he followed the creek from this home to his next stop which he referred to specifically as Dewey's Station. From there, he wrote that he was dispatched to a still-existing home with an apple orchard which has also been independently reported to have been an Underground Railroad site. This third home had once had a barn with a secret room beneath the floor, claimed to have been the Underground Railroad hiding spot.

After the Georgia visitor shared the letter, the boys' home director asked a television station to run a story. White and others are trying to locate the news footage, Georgia visitor and letter. Anyone with information on any of these is asked to contact Ms. White through *Underground Railroad Free Press*.

The Beckmize Historical Society plans to operate the renovated home as a museum. The Society is a new addition to the Lynx Underground Railroad registry.

## Students

Church. Cornish was a founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1827, he and John Russwurm started *Freedom's Journal*, the first black newspaper. Cornish later served as editor of *The Rights of All* and *The Colored American*. Cornish used his publications to inform the public on abolitionist issues.

Shiloh Church's second pastor, Theodore S. Wright, was born free to an American mother and Kenyan father. The first African-American to attend Princeton Theological Seminary, Wright became minister of New York's Colored Presbyterian Church, was a founding member of the American Anti-Slavery Society, and worked as an Underground Railroad conductor in New York. In 1843 Wright supported Henry Highland Garnet's call for a slave uprising, opposed by Frederick Douglass and only narrowly defeated.

Cornish and Wright are known to have died in New York City and may have been interred in the Shiloh Church vaults and reinterred at Maple Grove Cemetery.

Another of Shiloh's pastors, James Pennington, born a slave in Maryland, escaped to Pennsylvania at age 20 where he was taught by a Quaker to read and write. In 1828 Pennington moved to New York and became pastor of the Temple Street Congregational Church, joined the campaign against slavery, and became friends with abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Lewis Tappan. In 1839 Pennington aided the successful Supreme Court case which freed Joseph Cinque and his fellow Africans who had been arrested for their mutiny aboard the *Amistad*. Pennington's *The Origin and History of the Coloured People* was published in 1841 and his autobiography, *The Fugitive Blacksmith*, was serialized in *The Afro-American* in 1859. In 1861, he represented Connecticut at the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London.

Henry Highland Garnet, among the most radical of American abolitionists, became pastor of Shiloh Church sometime after 1869. In a long, distinguished career, Garnet also served as pastor of churches in Buffalo and Washington, DC, and on Lincoln's last birthday in 1865, became the first African-American to preach to the United States House of Representatives. Garnet founded the African Civilization Society, recruited for the United States Colored Troops in the Civil War, and served as president of Pittsburgh's Avery College. Garnet was the grandson of a captured Mandinka warrior prince of whom it is said that he inherited his fiery disposition.

Carl Ballenas's students have found that Frederick Douglass often spoke at Shiloh Church, and that it had many prominent visitors including Anthony Burns who had been captured in Massachusetts under the Fugitive Slave Act, re-enslaved in Virginia, and ransomed back to Massachusetts, and Roberts Smalls who had commandeered a Confederate ship in Charleston harbor and ferried freedom seekers to the offshore Union blockade.

The students continue researching the Shiloh Church, learning first hand of its Underground Railroad roles, influential ministers, congregants and visitors. In homework essays, they write that these clergymen and visitors were great thinkers, speakers and leading abolitionists. Ballenas describes finding the Shiloh Church reburial ground as his classes' doorway to the past, and thought that *Free Press* readers would like to know about this discovery. Indeed they do.