



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

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Underground Railroad Free Press Celebrates Tenth Anniversary

By Peter H. Michael, Publisher

This issue of *Underground Railroad Free Press* marks ten years since *Free Press* was launched in July of 2006. My, what a lot has happened since.

The genesis of *Free Press* was conversations I had in 2005 with several board members of the now defunct Friends of the Underground Railroad as we discussed the need for a nexus of modern Underground Railroad work. An international registry, calendar of events, annual prizes for outstanding work, and a news outlet all came up, but no consensus was reached on how to put all of this into place. Some time after these conversations, I decided to take on the responsibility and launched *Free Press*.

Volume 1, issue 1 contained articles on the debut of *Free Press*, threatened Underground Railroad sites in Maryland and New York City, a new Harriet Tubman memorial in Bristol, Pennsylvania, and an Underground Railroad safe-house featured on national television. Through the years, we followed the stories of the threatened sites, all of which ended up surviving and, partly due to *Free Press* advocacy, gaining official protection. That put *Free Press* off to a good start. For that slim first issue which went out to an email list of only 800, visit the *Free Press* archives.

Since then our basic subscriber list has grown to nearly 5,000 Underground Railroad site owners, descendants, program operators, scholars, elected and other officials, and enthusiasts, with more being added all the time. Our annual surveys tell us that over half of our subscribers forward *Free Press* or its publication notices to about 26,000 others, in a

few cases to more than 1,000, and that some of them forward the newsletter.

As soon as *Free Press* began publication, its Lynx registry of Underground Railroad organizations and Datebook calendar of Underground Railroad events were launched, establishing the central nexus that many in the international Underground Railroad community had urged. From a dozen or so then, Lynx today lists over 150 Underground Railroad sites, programs, collections and other organizations. Used in conjunction with *Free Press* partner MapMuse.com (mapmuse.com/map/underground-rr), Lynx provides the traveller with directions and a wealth of information on Underground Railroad sites to visit.

In 2008 *Free Press* launched two important new programs: annual surveys of the international Underground Railroad community and three annually awarded prizes for outstanding leadership, preservation and advancement of knowledge in the community. Inky, our logo, also came along about this time. Prizes have now been awarded to 24 individuals and organizations recognizing a wide spectrum of outstanding work. Our September issue will feature the next three. Don't miss it.

The *Free Press* surveys, the community's only comprehensive means of assessing current status of the community and its work, provide a wealth of information on the knowledge, attitudes, practices, economics and trends of Underground Railroad programs and people. Survey results published for public use provide a wealth of new knowledge which pro-

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Free Press observes a milestone birthday. Celebrate with us.

1



Don't wait. Nominate a deserving person or group for one of the 2016 *Free Press* Prizes.

1



Two acclaimed authors are now out with an Underground Railroad novel and a local Underground Railroad history.

2



Was Underground Railroad icon Josiah Henson a cousin of the first United States president? Sure looks like it.

3



The Buffalo Soldiers Memorial Highway is set to become a reality in California.

3



Publicize your event at the *Free Press* Datebook. Get listed at Lynx. Submit an article or letter to the editor.

Email us at info@urrfreepress.com.

gram operators, elected officials, researchers and others use in planning and executing their Underground Railroad work. Some important findings from the annual surveys to date are:

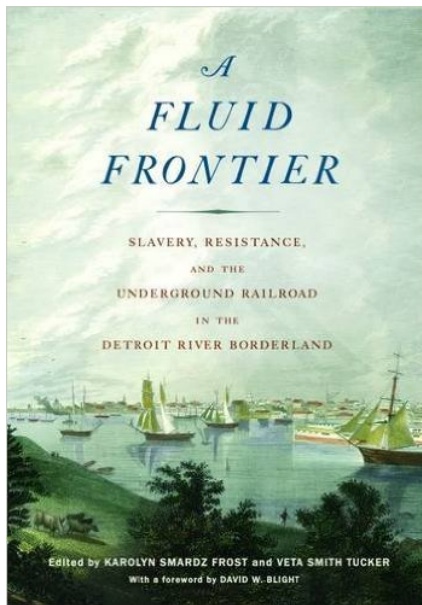
- Handed-down stories are the key in retaining Underground Railroad knowledge and identifying Underground Railroad sites, as only four percent of claimed Underground Railroad sites have conclusive
- Please go to *Ten Years*, page 4, column 1

Nominate a Person or an Organization for a 2016 *Free Press* Prize

Since 2008, *Underground Railroad Free Press* has awarded annual prizes for contemporary Underground Railroad leadership, preservation and advancement of knowledge, the top honors in the international Underground Railroad community. Individuals and organizations from any country are eligible for nomination.

Nominating is easy: download a nomination form at our website, complete it, and email it to info@urrfreepress.com. The nomination deadline for 2016 is August 30. Visit urrfreepress.com/#prizes for more information and to view past winners.

Two New Underground Railroad Books

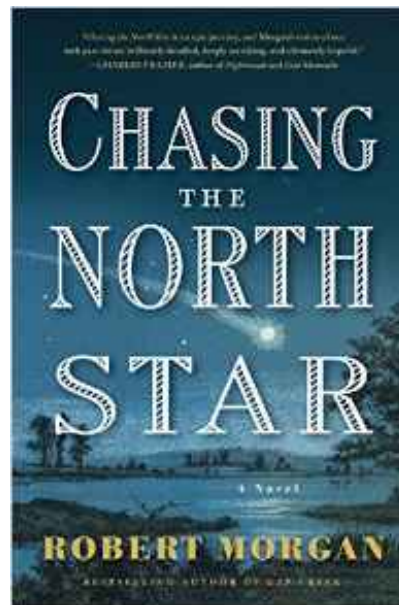


Prize-winning Canadian author Karolyn Frost is out with a new Underground Railroad book. In *A Fluid Frontier: Slavery, Resistance and the Underground Railroad in the Detroit River Borderland*, Frost and co-editor Veta Tucker compiled an anthology of chapters by 14 authors on the dynamics of the Underground Railroad on the Detroit River's busy crossing between Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, Canada.

The authors bill *A Fluid Frontier* as "new research on the long, shared struggle for freedom by people of African descent in the Detroit River borderland from a uniquely bi-national perspective." Emphasis is on settlements founded by Underground Railroad fugitives on both sides of the border and the bonds among them lasting up into the present.

Archaeologist, historian, educator and author Frost is Senior Research Fellow at York University's Harriet Tubman Institute in Toronto, and Visiting Professor at Nova Scotia's Acadia University. *I've Got a Home in Glory Land: A Lost Tale of the Underground Railroad*, her biography of fugitive slaves Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, won her the 2009 *Free Press* Prize for the Advancement of Knowledge, and the Governor General's Award for Non-Fiction, Canada's highest literary honor.

Veta Tucker taught African American literature and Studies at Michigan's Grand Valley State University. She has written on enslaved black women, forgotten 19th-century African American author Julia Collins, historical fiction by contempo-



rary African American women, and *A Twenty-First Century History of the 1847 Kentucky Raid in Cass County, Michigan*.

Best-selling author Robert Morgan, author of the well received *Gap Creek* and national bestseller *Boone: A Biography*, now adds *Chasing the North Star: A Novel* to his very long book shelf.

Reviews have been glowing.

Said the *New York Journal of Books*, "*Chasing the North Star* by Robert Morgan is the gripping and convincing story of a bright and courageous slave in the American South during the 1850s who runs away seeking freedom. Richly imaginative and thoroughly researched, *Chasing the North Star* walks the reader through an extensive and thrilling escape filled with fiery insight and deep personal conviction.

"Morgan summons a narrative that clearly describes the people, culture, and emotions of the time, especially in antebellum North Carolina and later in New York. His personal connection to the land, including its history and features, enables the reader to experience the thrilling escape vividly. His historical nuances and references are spot-on. *Chasing the North Star* is an epic journey, vividly detailed, acutely satisfying, and ultimately hopeful. It sheds light upon some of the darkest moments in American history; yet it also illuminates the charity and love expressed by whites who hid, fed and aided the runaways at the risk of their own lives and those of their families."

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Archeological Research All but Confirms Josiah Henson Related to First President



Josiah Henson

Underground Railroad
Icon Josiah Henson

Julia King, Professor of Anthropology at Saint Mary's College of Maryland, is convinced that findings in an archeological dig she is directing at the Francis Newman Plantation in southern Maryland confirm the site as the birth place of Underground Railroad icon Josiah Henson. King's findings mesh closely with those of author Peter H. Michael in his biography of John Hanson, the first president of the original United States government under the Articles of Confederation. Washington and presidents into the 20th century have recognized Hanson as the nation's actual first president. Michael's research showed that Henson and Hanson were almost certainly related.

Josiah Henson, one of the most famous Underground Railroad figures and whose life was in significant part the basis of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 landmark *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was born enslaved. After escaping slavery on the Underground Railroad in 1829, Henson settled in Canada, founded the town of Dawn, Ontario, established the first school for Under-



LaGrange, the ancestral home
of Josias Hanson McPherson

ground Railroad freedom seekers, and became one of history's most prominent and articulate advocates for emancipation and human rights.

At a time when a bestseller might sell ten thousand copies in the United States, Stowe's definitive exposé of slavery quickly sold a half million copies at home and within a few years as many abroad. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been translated into 60 languages, is still regarded as the most influential book ever written by an American, and has never been out of print since its original publication in 1852.

In his 1849 autobiography which heavily influenced Stowe's book, Henson's description of the mistreatment of his parents is as vivid as it gets in exposing the horrors of slavery. In the words of the son, "I was born, June 15, 1789, in Charles County, Maryland, on a farm belonging to Mr. Francis N[ewman], about a mile from Port Tobacco. My mother was the property of Dr. Josiah McP[herson], but was hired by Mr. N., to whom my father belonged. The only incident I can remember, which occurred while my mother continued on N.'s farm, was the appearance of my father one day, with his head bloody and his back lacerated. He was in a state of great excitement, and though it was all a mystery to me at the age of three or four years, it was explained at a later period, and I understood that he had been suffering the cruel penalty of the Maryland law for beating a white man. His right ear had been cut off close to his head, and he had received a hundred lashes on his back. He had beaten the overseer for a brutal assault on my moth-

Please go to *Hanson/Henson*, page 4, column 2

Buffalo Soldiers Highway Proposed

With thanks, the following is adapted from trailposse.com and the HuffingtonPost.com blog of Audrey Peterman.

When conservation pioneer John Muir and President Theodore Roosevelt met at Yosemite National Park in 1903 to hatch the idea of the federal government taking the primary role in conservation, looking on were the park's operators, the famed Buffalo Soldiers

This year, the 150th anniversary of the Buffalo Soldiers Regiment and 100th of the National Park Service, Robert Hanna, Muir's great-great-grandson, proposed that the stretch of California Route 41 leading into the park, the route which the Buffalo Soldiers took in and out of Yosemite, be renamed the Buffalo Soldiers Memorial Highway.

On April 21, Muir's 178th birthday, California Assemblyman Frank Bigelow introduced Concurrent Resolution 174 to rename the highway. The legislation is passing committees without opposition.



A Buffalo Soldier circa 1900

In 1903, Charles Young, the Buffalo Soldiers' commanding officer, became the first African American superintendent of a national park. The Buffalo Soldiers built the first trail to the top of Mount Whitney, highest peak in the lower 49 states; the first road into the Giant Forest in Sequoia National Park; and the first marked nature trail in the national park system.

Shelton Johnson, an African American ranger at Yosemite credited with keeping alive the story of the Buffalo Soldiers, helped introduce the story to the nation in the Ken Burns documentary, "The National Parks: America's Best Idea."

The Buffalo Soldiers Regiment was disbanded in 1951 as President Truman's order integrating the armed services was carried out.

Help Solve the Mystery

A DNA comparison of Henson and Hanson descendants would tell the story if President John Hanson and Josiah Henson were indeed related. If so, they were first cousins three times removed, and Josiah Henson and author Peter Michael are related, as Michael is a Hanson descendant.

If you know a Henson descendant willing to give a cheek swab of DNA, please email info@urrfreepress.com. Free Press will pay DNA analysis costs and share results with the donor.

Ten Years

documentation of having had Underground Railroad involvement. The other 96 percent rely on their oral traditions handed down in families, from owner to owner, or in rare news or court records. With little or no backup evidence, more than two-thirds of Underground Railroad sites have only their stories to rely on.

- Underground Railroad programs took a hard hit financially during and after the Great Recession of 2008-9, but by 2015 recovery was underway with twice as many budget increases as declines.
- With a mean age around 60 and three-fourths of the community older than this, more ways need to be found to interest and engage young people in the Underground Railroad.
- Three modern Underground Railroad organizations are far better known than others. They are *Free Press*, the National Park Service's Network to Freedom program, and Cincinnati's Underground Railroad Freedom Center in that order.

So where is *Free Press* today? Let us be immodest by pointing out that in the 2015 survey the Underground Railroad community rated *Free Press* as the most familiar and most effective private or public Underground Railroad institution, and that community ratings of *Free Press* programs were the highest ever, all at or near nine on a ten-point rating scale. How tremendously gratifying!

However, *Free Press* has now grown to the point where we can use help and so, as you'll see in this year's survey, we are recruiting volunteers to assist in various capacities. In the longer term, we'll need another organization or an exceptional individual to take over *Free Press* publication and program management. When our stewardship of *Free Press* needs to close, it is vital that this effective, necessary node of the Underground Railroad community continue indefinitely.

From *Underground Railroad Free Press*, thanks to you for your support over the past ten years and especially for all that you do to sustain the memory of the moral triumph called the Underground Railroad in the United States and Canada.

Keep up your fine work and continue to spread the word.

With much gratitude,

Peter H. Michael, Publisher

Hanson/Henson

er, and this was his punishment. Furious at such treatment, my father became a different man, and was so morose, disobedient, and intractable, that Mr. N. determined to sell him. He accordingly parted with him, not long after, to his son, who lived in Alabama; and neither my mother nor I ever heard of him again. He was naturally, as I understood afterwards from my mother and other persons, a man of amiable temper, and of considerable energy of character; but it is not strange that he should be essentially changed by such cruelty and injustice under the sanction of law."

Dr. Josias Hanson McPherson's grandfather, Samuel Hanson of Robert, was the first cousin of President John Hanson. Samuel's daughter Benedicta married Henry McPherson. The fifth of her and Henry's children was the Josias Hanson McPherson of interest here.

In his autobiography, Henson writes of his enslaver Josias Hanson McPherson, "As the first negro child ever born to him, I was his especial pet. He gave me his own Christian name, Josiah, and with that he also gave me my last name, Henson, after an uncle of his, who was an officer in the revolutionary war." (Emphasis added) The uncle was Major Samuel Hanson (not Henson) McPherson. That Josias Hanson McPherson would name his "first negro child" and "especial pet" Josiah Henson — or perhaps originally Josiah Hanson or Josias Hanson — gives quick rise to the suspicion that Josias Hanson McPherson fathered Josiah Henson, an all too frequent indignity inflicted on enslaved families by their enslavers.

That Henson describes himself as McPherson's first negro child could be literal and begs deeper conjecture. In his biography, Josiah Henson ascribes his father as his mother's husband sold south, but also reveals that this man was kept on the plantation of his enslaver, Francis Newman, and that his mother was the property of Josias Hanson McPherson. Though for some period Henson's mother was hired out by McPherson to Newman after Josiah Henson's birth, McPherson would have had access to the mother whenever he wanted. This combination of circumstances raises the possibility, perhaps the likelihood, that Josiah Henson was actually a McPherson related to the Hansons through Josias Hanson McPherson. Remaining unexplained is the one-letter difference in the spelling of

the surnames Hanson and Henson. This might be attributed to Henson's London biographer John Lobb recording the name as he thought he heard his illiterate subject narrate it in the 1870s.

In 1805, Josiah Henson's mother was sold to Isaac Riley, a farmer in Montgomery County, Maryland. In the same auction, Josiah was sold to Adam Robb, a tavern keeper in Rockville near the Riley farm. After the boy fell ill, Josiah Henson was sold in either 1805 or 1806 by Robb to Riley and began living in the Riley household's slave cabin reunited with his mother. In an ironic twist of history, the cabin and farm where it is located were later owned by John Hanson's grandson, United States Senator Alexander Contee Hanson, Jr., before 1819 when the Senator died. Riley's slaves were not included in the sale.

In 2006, the Riley farmhouse where Josiah Henson had been enslaved was rediscovered in Montgomery County, Maryland, and purchased as a public historic site by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. This, the actual site of the cabin on which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is based, is now regarded by many as the single most spectacular rediscovery of the Underground Railroad. The farmhouse's attached cabin, which for a time was believed to be the actual place of enslavement of Josiah Henson and therefore "the original Uncle Tom's Cabin," is now thought to have been the home's kitchen.

Josiah Henson died May 5, 1883, deeply revered in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. In 1909, his great-grand-nephew, Matthew Henson, who accompanied Admiral Robert Peary on his expedition to the North Pole, became the first person ever to set foot at the Pole as he scouted ahead of Peary and the exploration party.

The exploration of the Newman farm continues under the watchful eye of Dr. King to whom this particular dig feels special. Said King, "I was really just overwhelmed with emotion, and was really just grateful that I had the opportunity to get this bigger story out."

Says Michael, "Dr. King's discoveries fit hand in glove with what I found in my research on the blood connections among Josiah Henson, his mother's enslaver, and President Hanson. This spectacular story is as American as it gets." [Note: Peter Michael is the publisher of *Underground Railroad Free Press*.]