



Underground Railroad Free Press®

News and views on today's Underground Railroad

urrfreepress.com

March, 2007

Volume 2, Issue 2



Editorial

The Underground Railroad An International Enterprise

More and more in our work with *Underground Railroad Free Press* and our other Underground Railroad projects, we notice the increasing interest within Canada in particular and also in the United States of Canada's historical and modern roles in the Underground Railroad.

Just in putting together this issue, we noticed again how much now appears on the internet regarding Canada's vital historical role in the Underground Railroad and present-day interest in it. Readers will note that the first three articles of this issue all deal with Canada.

This growth in interest is most gratifying and probably stems from the general increase in interest in the Underground Railroad seen over the past decade. We encourage Canadian institutions such as *The Ottawa Citizen* and York University featured in this issue in their budding work on the Underground Railroad and hope to see more from them.

The Underground Railroad was indeed an international enterprise, especially after 1833 when the British Commonwealth including Canada abolished slavery. Canada became even more of a magnet for freedom seekers after passage of the United States' Fugitive Slave Act in 1850.

But other nations received freedom seekers, too. Fergus Bordewich in his *Bound for Canaan*, writes of Florida conductor Jonathon Walker who ferried freedom seekers by boat to the British-ruled Bahamas.

Others successfully made their ways to other Caribbean islands and to Mexico, and Frederick Douglass got as far as England.

Already internationalized is Google's definitive MapMuse map of Underground Railroad safe-houses and routes, in our opinion the best such

(continued on page two)

Canadian Reporter Walks the Underground Railroad

For twelve weeks last summer, *Ottawa Citizen* reporter Chris Lackner walked an Underground Railroad route 535 miles from May's Lick, Kentucky, to Buxton, Canada. The walk resulted in Lackner's *Ottawa Citizen* series, *Tracks to Freedom*.

Adhering as closely as possible to an Underground Railroad freedom seeker's experience, Lackner spent his nights in old homes and churches that had been Underground Railroad safe-houses, a 200-year-old jail and a former slave plantation.

On his walk, Lackner sought out those keeping intact the Underground Railroad's history through their families' oral traditions, today's main source of knowledge of the Underground Railroad. Lackner says he will never forget Iva Johnson, a 97-year-old Kentuckian telling him of her enslaved grandmother, Cicly Bell, who endured whippings and 18-hour workdays, and during a failed flight to Canada nursed her baby in the bushes to avoid capture.

Lackner also met Ohio's Henry Burke, great-great-grandson of freedom seeker and Underground Railroad conductor John Curtis.

As they looked across into Ohio from a former plantation, Burke reminded that, "You just had to look across the river and you knew you had a shot at freedom."



Chris Lackner, Kentucky Underground Railroad historian Jerry Gore, and *Ottawa Citizen* photographer Malcolm Taylor walk a Kentucky route.

Ending his walk, Lackner arrived at a Buxton, Canada, cemetery to meet Spencer Alexander, great-grandson of Kentucky freedom seeker Thomas Alexander who, along with about 100 other freedom seekers, is buried in the old cemetery. Buxton was founded by freedom seekers.

For the full *Tracks to Freedom* series, visit <http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/>

Canada's York University Names Institute for Harriet Tubman

Canada's York University has announced the establishment of the Harriet Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African Peoples which will focus on the study of the diaspora of African peoples, slavery and related issues in shaping the modern world.

The institute will be dedicated at the university on March 25, the 200th anniversary of Canada's abolition of the slave trade.

Developed by Paul Lovejoy, the university's Canada Research Chair in African Diaspora History, the Tubman Institute is operated jointly by York University and an international advisory board, and serves as repository for archival documents, tapes, maps, images and other primary sources preserved and archived in searchable digitized format.

The new institute incorporates the university's Harriet Tubman Resource Centre on the African Diaspora operating since 2002 and the UNESCO Nigerian Hinterland Project. Institute members include York University fac-

ulty, post-doctoral fellows, graduate and undergraduate students and visiting scholars.

The university named the institute after Harriet Tubman for her courage and commitment to social change, and her advocacy of African-American citizenship and women's rights.



Toronto's York University

York University, a private institution, is Canada's leading interdisciplinary research and teaching university and third largest.

map available. In recognition of the important international nature of the Underground Railroad and in the interest of historical accuracy, we urge site owners, program administrators, writers, reporters and other organizations and individuals involved in the modern Underground Railroad also to internationalize their work. We will, too.

Correction

In last issue's reporting on threatened Underground Railroad sites in Brooklyn, New York, we stated that several historic homes could be demolished to make way for the Atlantic Yards redevelopment project. In fact, the homes are adjacent to Atlantic Yards on a site slated by New York City for a parking garage as accompanying redevelopment of the area. We regret the error.

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Underground Railroad Free Press®
On Today's Underground Railroad

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Descendants of Freedom Seeker Frank Wanzer Plan Reunion

Descendants of Underground Railroad freedom seeker Frank Wanzer who fled to Canada in 1856, are planning a Toronto, Canada, reunion for August, 2007. Sculptor Allen Nelson, great-great-grandson and leading historian of Wanzer, is a reunion organizer.

For decades, Nelson and his sister Winona have researched the Wanzer party's escape and Frank Wanzer's life in Canada.

On Christmas Eve, 1855, Wanzer, his fiancée Emily Foster and Barnaby and Mary Elizabeth Grigby fled enslavement from near Aldie, Virginia, passing through William Still's Phila-

delphia safe-house and on to Canada in January, 1856. The two couples shared a home in Toronto for the rest of their lives, Frank Wanzer being the last to die in 1911.

Still's account of the Wanzer party's escape was included in his 1872 *The Underground Railroad*. The engraving he had made of the gun battle the two couples waged fighting off slave catchers is perhaps the most enduring Underground Railroad image of its time.

A Google search on Frank Wanzer turns up good sources on this Underground Railroad freedom seeker.

Murphy Named Freedom Center CEO

The board of directors of Cincinnati's Freedom Center, often regarded as the nation's foremost Underground Railroad museum, will install Donald Murphy as Freedom Center chief executive officer on May 1.



Freedom Center CEO-Elect
Donald Murphy

Murphy will succeed John Pepper, former Proctor & Gamble Chairman, who will become Cochairman of the Freedom Center board with the Rev. Damon Lynch. Spencer Crew remains as Freedom Center President.

Murphy served from 1991 through 1997 as Director of California State Parks and from 2001 to 2006 as Deputy Director of the National Park Service where his responsibilities included security, information technology, construction, maintenance, outreach, international affairs, educational programs, volunteer recruitment, training and oversight of the Network to Freedom, the Park

Service's Underground Railroad program.

The Freedom Center brought Pepper aboard in January, 2006, amidst financial difficulty after the museum accumulated a \$5.5 million operating deficit in its first 18 months of operation. In 2006, Pepper led the Freedom Center through a successful \$10 million capital campaign. [See the September, 2006, issue of *Underground Railroad Free Press* and FreedomCenter.org for more.]

Said Pepper, "Don Murphy is coming onboard at a time when we can point to many signs of progress in the Freedom Center's development."

Murphy said the Freedom Center's unique mission, as well as its roots in American history, attracted him to the CEO position.

The Freedom Center mission "celebrates the legacy of courage and multicultural cooperation embodied in the story of the Underground Railroad, and uses a wide array of exhibits and programs to educate the public about the historic and continuing struggle to establish universal freedom in both the United States and around the world."

Letters to the Editor

Harriet Tubman Day Work Dates to 1960s

The story of Harriet Tubman Day [*Underground Railroad Free Press*, January, 2007] dates to the 1960s to the late Mrs. Addie Clash Travers of Cambridge, Maryland. I met "Aunt Addie" and members of the Harriet Tubman Coalition and discussed with them the idea of making Tubman's memorial date March 10, 1990, the first International Day to honor the contributions of Harriet Tubman.

Mailing over 5,000 letters, she went to work contacting mayors, governors, members of Congress, other elected officials, schools, churches, organizations and the media. She organized the first congressional legislation, Public Law 101-252 of 1990, fol-

lowed by over 20 governors and numerous cities which proclaimed March 10, 1990, Harriet Tubman Day!

[Creating] a holiday is not an easy task and it takes tremendous courage, hard work, dedication and strategy to accomplish. Nevertheless, I as founder of the Harriet Tubman Historical Society, Inc. continue to preserve March 10th as Harriet Tubman Day and [to encourage] the contributions of women and families throughout the world including participants of the Underground Railroad. It is an evolving idea whose time has come!

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