



Editorial



2008 Underground Railroad Free Press Prize Nominations Accepted Through June 1

Nominations are arriving for the three *Underground Railroad Free Press Prizes* announced in our last issue. We would like to see more nominations to give the prizes' Panel of Judges plenty to choose from. To this end, we have extended the deadline for submission of nominations for the 2008 prizes to June 1, 2008.

The Prize for Leadership

Do you know a person who has done a fine job of leading an Underground Railroad or related organization or cause? Honor that person by nominating him or her for the 2008 *Free Press Prize for Leadership*.

The Prize for Preservation

Are you aware of an exceptional job of discovering, restoring or publicizing an Underground Railroad safe-house or route, an effort which has done a great job of bringing to light part of the Underground Railroad? Then be sure to nominate the person or group responsible.

The Prize for the Advancement of Knowledge

Have you read a book or article, or seen a play or heard a musical performance about the Underground Railroad that impressed you? If so, be the first to nominate the writer, producer, playwright, actor, musician or other modern voice of the Underground Railroad for deserved recognition.

Nominations are easy to write up and submit. Just go to our web site at urrFreePress.org, down-

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Underground Railroad Free Press®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

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Twin Canadian, US Monuments Honor Underground Railroad

One of the most heavily traveled Underground Railroad routes ushering freedom seekers from the United States to Canada was across the Detroit River from Detroit, Michigan, to Windsor, Ontario. The two nations have now erected statues on each shore to honor this historic gateway to freedom.

Shown on the left is Windsor's statue at Pitts and Goyeau Streets overlooking the river. To the right barely a half mile across the water from the Windsor monument is the American statue at Detroit's Hart Plaza.

The six figures in these tableaux now look to each other in perpetuity, calling out to future generations both the heartache and triumph that were the Underground Railroad and Canada's role as the Glory Land of those who fled there. Many freedom seekers who crossed into Canada at this point settled in Windsor or within a few miles of it.

We are grateful to Wayne Young, publisher of *Port of Harlem* magazine [portofharlem.net], for making us aware of these monuments and for providing the photographs here.



The Windsor Monument



The Detroit Monument

Official National Harriet Tubman Day On the Horizon

Representative Elijah Cummings, Democrat of Maryland, and 66 others in the House of Representatives including House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer have coauthored House Concurrent Resolution 310 supporting the establishment of March 10 as a permanent national Harriet Tubman Day. A concurrent bill has been introduced in the Senate, and passage is expected in both houses.

Tubman's birthday is unknown and so it is March 10, the day she died at the age of 91 in 1913, which is celebrated in her honor.

Relevant language of the bill reads, "The Congress supports the designation of a national day of remembrance for Harriet Ross Tubman and encourages the people of the United States to support and participate in appropriate ceremonies, programs, and other

activities to commemorate a national day of remembrance for Harriet Ross Tubman."

Maryland, Delaware, Georgia, Texas, Tennessee and New York already celebrate official annual observances of Harriet Tubman Day.

Maryland was the first state do so beginning in 2000 following the urging of Louis Fields, Maryland Underground Railroad Coalition president. Fields worked with Representative Cummings to launch the national day of observance, and testified before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform in support of Resolution 310. The bill reached the floor of the House on March 5.

With its own written testimony, *Underground Railroad Free Press* was pleased to support Resolution 310.

load the prize procedures and nomination form for the prize for which you would like to submit a nomination and email it in to us.

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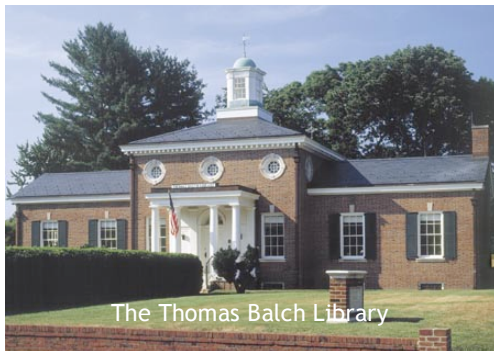
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Virginia's Balch Library Bares Southern Underground Railroad

Researching the Underground Railroad is difficult enough in northern states but when one gets south of the Potomac or Ohio Rivers, the challenge doubles. For example, in his 2005 *Bound for Canaan*, Fergus Bordewich recounts the difficulty of finding references to Underground Railroad activity in the South.

Bucking the trend, Virginia's Thomas Balch Library and its Black History Committee are making solid efforts to reveal black history and Underground Railroad activity in Loudoun County where the library is located. To bolster their efforts, library director Alexandra Gressitt has accelerated the collection of local African-Americana and is expanding the



The Thomas Balch Library

library's Underground Railroad collection.

There are numerous documented accounts of freedom seekers fleeing or passing through Loudoun County, the northern tip of Virginia bordering the Potomac River. Though part of the Confederacy, the County had mixed sympathies with strong pro-Union loyalties among its Black, Quaker and German communities. The county even mustered a Union Army outfit, the Loudoun Rangers. If not for its strategic importance to the Confederacy, Loudoun County might well have been able to peel off from Virginia as did the counties to its west when West Virginia was formed in 1862.

The library's Black History Committee was formed in 2000 and has since received several grants, added to library collections, cosponsored local historical projects and promoted outreach with the county's African-American community. Operated by the City of Leesburg, the library was created by a 1922 bequest from the sons of Thomas Balch, a local 19th century attorney.

The Thomas Balch Library sets an example of what is possible for southern institutions to do in revealing Underground Railroad activity and personages in the South.

What 2008 Underground Railroad Survey Topics Do You Want?

Underground Railroad Free Press's second annual survey of the international Underground Railroad community will be conducted in May, 2008. The invitation to take the survey will come in the May issue of *Free Press*.

If you want a topic included in the survey, email it now to publisher@urrfreepress.com and we will do our best to include it.

The 2007 *Free Press* Underground Railroad Survey was the first of its kind of the Underground Railroad community, and provided a wealth of information which we shared in the July, 2007, issue of *Free Press* and at our web site where the survey report is posted. To

view the 2007 report, visit urrfreepress.com and click on Survey.

Free Press's 1,500 subscribers along with other Underground Railroad officials and interested parties will be invited to participate in the 2008 survey. Survey results will be reported in the July, 2008, issue of *Free Press* and again posted in full at our web site.

We do our best to incorporate the most useful topics we can think of in the surveys, but our readers must have excellent topics which we haven't thought of. Tell us what you would like to learn and we'll try to include your topic in the 2008 survey.

Amazing Grace, the Film

It might come as a surprise that the haunting melody and lyrics of the spiritual song "Amazing Grace" were written by a repentant slave ship captain, but they were.

John Newton wrote "Amazing Grace" in the 1760s while working as a pastor. Captain of a slave ship for many years, Newton had undergone a dramatic religious conversion while steering his vessel through a storm.

Repenting and regretting the misery he had inflicted on the thousands of human cargo he had transported across the Middle Passage, he then devoted his life to his church and wrote a number of hymns still sung today.

In late 2007, 20th Century Fox released the film *Amazing Grace* starring Albert Finney as John Newton and Ioan Gruffudd as William

Wilberforce, the nobleman Member of Parliament who worked for decades to outlaw slavery in the British Empire. Wilberforce was Newton's parishioner.

Founded in 1856, Ohio's Wilberforce University, the nation's oldest private African-American university, was named in honor of



William Wilberforce

William Wilberforce.

Wilberforce lived to see British abolition passed into law on July 26, 1833, dying three days later.

Amazing Grace has become available on DVD and can be ordered at Netflix.