



Editorial

Introducing Underground Railroad Free Press Books

While recent years have seen several excellent books on the Underground Railroad, too many remain unpublished in an era when traditional publishers must be ever more selective in what they publish to survive as the industry reels under rapid change.

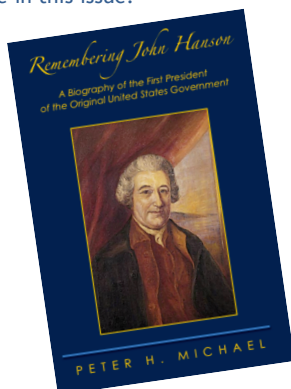
A few publishers have kept pace with rapidly changing book market but many have lagged, most conspicuously the Borders bookstore chain which vanished last fall. Add to this that no publisher is dedicated to Underground Railroad books.

Meanwhile, Amazon is now the largest bookseller and its e-books now surpass its print sales.

What this all means to Underground Railroad writers is ever fewer opportunities to get their works into print. Now Underground Railroad Free Press Books fills the void.

We offer authors of the Underground Railroad and related topics affordable publication services under our imprint. Editing, proofreading, publication, fulfillment, distribution and marketing may be purchased together or separately for books meeting Free Press Books standards.

The first Free Press book, *Remembering John Hanson*, tells the Josiah Henson story reported as the lead article in this issue.



For pricing, how our publication services work, and submission require-

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Underground Railroad Free Press®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

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Josiah Henson Probable Kin to John Hanson, First President

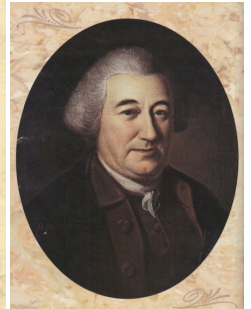
Recent research points strongly to the possibility that Underground Railroad icon Josiah Henson was related to John Hanson, the first president of the United States' original government under the Articles of Confederation.

Author Karolyn Smardz Frost and *Underground Railroad Free Press* publisher Peter H. Michael have unearthed historical and genealogical evidence definitively linking Henson and the Hanson family in time and place. Frost is author of the prize-winning *Underground Railroad* biography *I've Got a Home In Glory Land* and is a Free Press Prize judge.

The Henson-Hanson relationship is brought to light in Michael's recently released *Remembering John Hanson*.



Josiah Henson



John Hanson

Josiah Henson was born enslaved on the Charles County, Maryland, plantation of Dr. Josias Hanson McPherson in 1795 or 1796 ac-

Please see Henson, page 3, column 1

Smithsonian Opens Jefferson Slave Exhibit

Through October 14, the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African-American History and Culture offers "Slavery at Jefferson's Monticello: Paradox of Liberty," exploring the lives of the enslaved who built and maintained the national historic landmark, and of its ultimately conflicted owner.

The exhibit, conducted in concert with Monticello, looks at slavery in Revolutionary War-era America, how the plantation's enslaved families fared in Jefferson's time, and Jefferson's descendants, black and white, since.

In 1784, the ultimately conflicted Jefferson, not yet willing to part with his slaves but knowing that continued slavery tainted the new nation's professed ideals, posing a long-term national threat, chaired a committee of the nation's first government charged with organizing lands west of the Appalachians.

The Jefferson Plan included prohibition of slavery. If passed, it would have held slavery to six eastern seaboard slave states, prohibit-

ing its seepage across the Appalachians. The plain choice laid before the Congress was to contain slavery within its 1784 boundaries or open the door for its national expansion with no western bulwark to stop it.

The Jefferson Plan *was defeated by a single vote* putting the United States on an unstoppable transit to the Civil War. Immediately grasping the full import of this failure, Jefferson anguished, "Thus we see the fate of millions unborn hanging on the tongue of one man, and heaven was silent in that awful moment."

In this raw example of the nation's torn soul on slavery, Thomas Jefferson, he of the enslaved common-law African-American wife Sally Hemings and their enslaved children, grieved the lost chance to abolish slavery and give uncompromised life to the soaring ideals he had penned in the Declaration of Independence eight years before.

Please see Jefferson, page 3, column 3

Maryland Proposes Tubman for US Capitol Emancipation Hall

Emancipation Hall, centerpiece of the new National Capitol Visitor Center, has moved beyond the concept stage as the Senate Rules Committee studies the Hall's final design.

Senator Catherine Pugh and Delegate Susan Lee of the Maryland General Assembly have cross-filed bills to have their state donate a statue of Harriet Tubman to Emancipation Hall as the Hall's signature element.

The bills were urged by Tubman descendants and by the Maryland Underground Railroad Coalition and its president, Louis Fields.

Pugh, Lee and cosponsors also put forth a bill

to ask other states to observe Harriet Tubman Day, celebrated each March in Maryland since 2000 when Fields recommended legislation making the observance official.

All four 2012 bills are expected to pass the Maryland General Assembly with bipartisan support and little if any opposition.

The bill proposing the donation to Emancipation Hall follows an unsuccessful 2011 bill to install a Tubman statue in the Capitol's National Statuary Hall. But the Hall's statues, two per state, are now scattered about the Capitol in many places where visitors are no longer allowed for security reasons.

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Four Underground Railroad Conferences Queued Up

The Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region will hold its 11th annual conference April 13-15, at Russell Sage College, in Troy, New York. The conference offers a visit to the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church of Henry Highland Garnet, an Underground Railroad site tour and a jazz performance. Visit ugrworkshop.com for more.

Next, the National Park Service's **Network to Freedom** program will host its 6th annual conference, themed "Escaping to Destinations South," in St. Augustine, Florida, June 20-23. Search at the Park Service website or call 404.507.5830 for information.

The Choptank Region History Network will host its Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Conference, "Connecting Pieces of the Puzzle," at Cambridge, Maryland's Chesapeake College June 1-2. Email Tubman.Conference@gmail.com.

Across the Chesapeake Bay in Baltimore, the Association of African-American Museums will convene "Commemorating Struggles: Claiming Freedom" on August 22-25 at the Reginald Lewis Museum of Maryland African

William Still In PBS Bio

On February 6, the Public Broadcasting System premiered "The Underground Railroad: The William Still Story," a 60-minute bio of the famed Philadelphia safe-house operator.

PBS stations will rebroadcast the William Still Story from time to time. Check local PBS listings. The program may be purchased as a DVD or viewed free at the PBS website, and Amazon sells the DVD for \$14.95.

Beginning sometime in the 1850s at great risk, Still began recording the stories of freedom seekers passing through his care, and in 1872 published his *The Underground Railroad*

Grass Roots + Web Reveal Buffalo Underground Railroad

As the resurgence of Underground Railroad interest has spread in recent years, more lost pieces of its mosaic have come to light, often thanks to the work of individual Underground Railroad enthusiasts.


While oral traditions and sparse documentation long held that certain buildings in Buffalo, New York, were used in the Underground Railroad, work by Cynthia Van Ness has now documented many buildings' roles.

Says Van Ness, "When Google Books began, the full-text search capability helped me locate many finds. I also used local databases, which included some 19th century African-American newspapers in full text."

With advocates like Van Ness identifying more safe-houses and routes, more pieces of an almost lost puzzle fall into place. As oth-

er American History and Culture. Visit BlackMuseums.org for more.

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The Underground Railroad Turned on Its Head: Old Themes, New Directions

April 13 -15, 2012

Organized by Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc.
Hosted by Russell Sage College, Troy, New York
In Collaboration with Rensselaer County Historical Society

Keynote speakers:

Manisha Sinha, Ph.D., University of Massachusetts
"Fleeing for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves and the Making of American Abolitionism"

Barbara McCaskill, Ph.D., University of Georgia
"A Thousand Miles for Freedom: a New Take on the Old Story of Ellen and William Craft, the Georgia Fugitives"

Alan Singer, Ph.D., Hofstra University
"Abolition: From Marginalization to Emancipation"

Miles Ahead Jazz Quartet
Spectres of Liberty: the Ghost of Liberty Church
UGRR Tours of Schenectady and Troy

"The gold standard of UGRR conferences" ...Fergus Bordewich
Information at www.ugrworkshop.com

telling in 190 accounts the escapes of over 900 souls. Still in print, the book remains the prime collection of first-hand accounts of the Underground Railroad.

PBS was joined by significant Canadian sponsorship including the Canadian National Railway, Canada Media Fund and Rogers Cable Network. The program was produced by Toronto's 90th Parallel Productions and WNED-Buffalo/Toronto.

Free Press Prize judges Fergus Bordewich and Carolyn Frost are among the program's narrators.

ers do the same authenticating their own sites, local Underground Railroad maps begin to interlink revealing the stories of a growing number of Underground Railroad figures.

Once a site is identified, next steps are to rate site authenticity on the Wellman Scale, then post sites and ratings at the Underground Railroad map of MapMuse.com. Links to both are at the *Free Press* website.

Van Ness is the Buffalo & Erie County Historical Society's Director of Libraries and Archives. A list of Buffalo sites which she has authenticated is at BuffaloResearch.com.

Look for it in Early April

Tom Calarco's Underground Railroad program on WebTalkRadio.net, a first. There will be a program link at the Free Press website.

Henson

cording to Frost who corrects Henson's usually cited birth year of 1789.

In his autobiography dictated to London transcriber John Lobb in the 1870s, Henson says of 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." The uncle was Major Samuel Hanson 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.

Henson's describing himself as McPherson's first negro child could be literal and begs deeper conjecture. In his autobiography, 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, while his mother lived on Josias Hanson McPherson's plantation.

Though for some period his mother was hired out by McPherson to a nearby farm after Josiah Henson's birth, McPherson would have had access to her whenever he wanted before (or after) the birth. This combination of circumstances raises the possibility, perhaps the likelihood, that Josiah Henson was actually a McPherson related to the Hanson family through Josias Hanson McPherson.

The McPherson farm was a mile from Mulberry Grove, ancestral farm of John Hanson. Dr. Josias Hanson McPherson's grandfather, Samuel Hanson, was President John Hanson's first cousin. If Josiah Henson and John Hanson (1715-1783) were related, they were first cousins three generations removed.

Since President Hanson was related to Presidents William Henry Harrison and Benjamin Harrison, this would make Henson related to three presidents.

As President Hanson is related to Peter Michael, he and Henson, if they are related, are fourth cousins twice removed.

Remaining unexplained is the one-letter difference in the spelling of the surnames Hanson and Henson. This might be attributed to Lobb's recording the name as he thought he heard his semi-literate

subject narrate it in the 1870s.

Josiah Henson, among the most famous of Underground Railroad freedom seekers, was in significant part the basis of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 landmark *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

After escaping slavery on the Underground Railroad in 1829, Henson settled in Canada, founded the town of Dawn, Ontario, established the first school for Underground Railroad freedom seekers, and became one of history's most prominent and articulate advocates for emancipation and human rights.

Josiah Henson died May 5, 1883, probably in his late eighties, deeply revered in the United States, Canada where he settled, and elsewhere.

In 1909 his great-grandnephew, 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.

Uncle Tom's Cabin, published in 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.

John Hanson, a major Revolutionary War militia raiser, logistician and financier, persuaded Maryland at the last hour to join in the Declaration of Independence, and later brokered the Articles of Confederation, after all others had failed, permitting nationhood and establishment of the first government.

These two nation-saving strokes led to his unanimous election as president as the first government was formed November 5, 1781. John Hanson ably administered the nation's government during the Articles' prescribed one-year presidential term in 1781-82.

Hanson died away from home on November 22, 1783. In an astounding twist of fate unique to any United States president, his grave was forgotten, robbed and bulldozed after a developer bought the property in the 1980s, and rediscovered by Peter Michael in 2011 in time for inclusion in the John Hanson biography.

DNA comparison of Henson and Hanson descendants would determine if Josiah Henson is indeed related to President John Hanson. A Hanson descendant is willing to provide a DNA sample. *Free Press* seeks a Henson descendant related to Josiah Henson willing to do the same.

Jefferson

The 1787 Northwest Ordinance did manage to prohibit slavery in the six states of the Northwest Territory, but was followed in 1788 with a Constitution which fatally sidestepped the issue except to exacerbate it by legislating that enslaved Americans were to be counted as three-fifths of a human being and then only for apportioning white representation in the new House of Representatives.

After years of resistance, the Thomas Jefferson Foundation which owns and operates Monticello relented to a degree in its denial of scientific evidence that Jefferson sired a line of descendants borne by Sally Hemings. The Monticello website acknowledges that, "Most historians now believe that the documentary and genetic evidence, considered together, strongly support the conclusion that Jefferson was the father of Sally Hemings's children." The Foundation, which maintains Monticello's graveyard where Jefferson descendants continue to be interred, still remains segregated.

Readers Invited: 2012 Free Press Prizes and Survey

Each spring, we ask our readers whom they believe deserve special recognition for Underground Railroad work. Each fall, we then award the *Underground Railroad Free Press Prizes for Leadership, Preservation and Advancement of Knowledge* in the international Underground Railroad community.

If you have someone you would like to nominate, let us urge you to do so. It's easy. Go to urrFreePress.com, click on Prizes, download a nomination form and email it to us. While you are there, enjoy having a look at past prize winners and their accomplishments.

Free Press also sponsors the annual *Free Press Survey of the International Underground Railroad Community* and shares results with the community, public officials and others. The surveys include some questions carried forward each year to track trends, and new questions on recent developments.

Some of the most valuable lessons learned from these surveys since the first in 2007 came from reader suggestions. Let us know what you think would be good to ask in the 2012 survey which will be administered online in May. Subscribers will be invited to participate. Survey results will be presented in our July issue and full results posted on our website.