



# UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

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## Nations Mark Harriet Tubman 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

See our *Tubman* editorial on page 4

This issue is released five days early today in observance of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of Underground Railroad icon Harriet Tubman. As her birthday is unknown, it is on the anniversary of her passing on March 10, 1913, which is observed as Harriet Tubman Day.

A growing number of states and Canadian provinces now observe Harriet Tubman Day, perhaps none more tenderly than Maryland where Tubman was born. In addition to the state's official observance, an entire weekend of events sponsored by her descendants is

now unfolding near Tubman's birth place in Dorchester County.

Among observances across Canada, Salem Chapel in St. Catharine's, Ontario, where Tubman worshiped when in Canada, is holding a special church service today and a year-long series of events.

Tubman's own words explain her better than any biographer could. In an interview with Boston abolitionist Benjamin Drew, she vividly laid out her vision: "I grew up like a neglected weed, ignorant of lib-

Please see 100<sup>th</sup>, page 3, column 1



Clockwise from lower right: the home for the elderly built by Tubman in Auburn, New York; Tubman in very old age as a resident of the home; her grave in Auburn.

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## Robinson Named Underground Railroad Freedom Center CEO



Kim Robinson

The Board of Directors of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati has named Kim Robinson as Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director of the institution. Robinson was promoted from his previous position as the Center's Director of Advancement.

Before joining the Center in 2010, Robinson served as Vice President of Customer Business Development at Procter & Gamble where he was employed for twenty-eight years. Said Center Cochairman John Pepper, "I am

delighted that we are able to hand the reins over to Kim Robinson, a seasoned executive who has demonstrated the strength of his leadership at the Freedom Center. I am confident that he, with the staff and the Board, will be able to bring the Freedom Center to new heights."

Robinson replaces Donald W. Murphy who retired and had served as CEO since 2007. During Murphy's tenure, the Freedom Center's bond debt was fully retired, reducing the annual budget by more than half, and attendance increased.

# The Celebration of Watch Night and Emancipation

By Carl Westmoreland

In response to our article in the last issue of *Underground Railroad Free Press*, long-time Underground Railroad activist and historian Carl Westmoreland submitted the present article which tells more of the tradition of Watch Night. The author was awarded the 2010 *Underground Railroad Free Press* Prize in Leadership and serves as Senior Historian at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.

The tradition of Watch Night, according to Rice University scholar Jonathan Langston Chism, in an address December 31, 2010, began in 1733 in a Moravian congregation in what today is the Czech Republic. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church that began in England and quickly moved to America, believed that "Christians should reaffirm the Covenant with God annually." In 1784 Wesley held on New Year's Eve the first Methodist Watch Night service occurring at the St. George's Church in Philadelphia, in which both Richard Allen and Absalom Jones were members. When Allen and Jones left St. George's, both formed their own congregations—Allen, the African Methodist Episcopal Church; Ab-

salom Jones, the African Episcopal Church in Philadelphia.

The creation of the Mother Bethel AME congregation in 1794 in Philadelphia and the First African Baptist Church in Savannah, Georgia in 1773 provided an opportunity for Black religious leaders across America to begin to establish a distinct theological approach and worship style that would to this day distinguish the Black Church from the traditional White churches of America. Using the discipline of the Methodist church and the spontaneous worship style of the Baptist church, both of which Black Americans adopted willingly in contrast to their having sat on their hands and closed their minds to the staid worship style of the Episcopal church, the last day of December and the first day of January reflected the power of a new Church in America that coincided with the Emancipation Proclamation taking effect January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1863.

Watch Night would become a unique creation, a product of Africans in America who were respond-

*See Westmoreland, page 5, column 1*

It is that time of year to think about whom you would like to nominate for a Free Press Prize and what questions you would like to see answered in our annual survey.

## 2013 Free Press Prize Nominations

Each year since 2008, *Underground Railroad Free Press* has awarded 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 to be nominated. Visit our website for more information and nomination forms. The nomination deadline is June 30. You can view past winners at our website.

## The 2013 Free Press Survey

*Free Press* conducts annual surveys of the international Underground Railroad community. Survey results are posted permanently at our website each July and reports are provided to top Underground Railroad executives. If you have a question you would like to see answered in the 2013 survey, email us at [publisher@urrFreePress.com](mailto:publisher@urrFreePress.com) before May 1. You can view or download past survey reports at our website.

## Connor Prairie

*One of an occasional series on Underground Railroad sites and programs*

Conner Prairie State Park in Fishers, Indiana, bills itself as an interactive history park and living history museum that recreates nineteenth-century Indiana life along the White River. Since 1998, nearly 60,000 people have participated in Conner Prairie's

nationally-acclaimed, award-winning Follow the North Star Underground Railroad experience, developed from years of extensive research.

Participants walk an old Underground Railroad route rain or shine and are introduced by docents to the hazards that were encountered by freedom seekers along the way. Follow the North Star also offers an indoor evening lecture program on the local Underground Railroad.

Conner Prairie was a gift from industrialist Eli Lilly in the 1930s. In 1974, Lilly donated the historic, restored pioneer home of William Conner to a public charitable trust of which nearby [Earlham College](#), a Quaker institution, was named trustee. Lilly also transferred 1,400 acres of surrounding farmland to the college on which Earlham built a museum and constructed Prairietown, an authentic replica of an 1836 village. The College owns and operates Conner Prairie and is advised by a volunteer advisory board.

Conner Prairie also operates the Lenape Indian Camp as an interpretive experience.



A cabin at Indiana's Connor Prairie Interactive History Park



## Cultivating Common Ground Among All Peoples

When Walt Michael spent college summers as a volunteer in West Virginia creating a library from an old two-room schoolhouse, he couldn't have known that what he would find in the far hollows there would lead to his life's work.

Nearly twenty years ago as Artist In Residence at McDaniel College, Michael launched Common Ground on the Hill, an annual summer program promoting good race relations through traditional music. The Common Ground centerpiece is its two-week summer program which now offers 250 courses to nearly a thousand participants annually and performances by international roots music stars. Summer programs are also run in Gettysburg and the Arizona borderlands, and year-round performances in Baltimore and Westminster, Maryland.

Related to ten clergy over the last 200 years including his father, grandfather and sister, and descended from Underground Railroad safe-house operators, Michael has set a lifelong example of fostering good race relations, finding common ground among all peoples. Coming naturally to him, he is good at it.

A Supreme Court Page as a teen, Michael had picked up the guitar and would later

learn a range of other stringed instruments. At the cabins and barns of the descendants of the Scots-Irish travelers who had populated the hills surrounding the town of Welch, West Virginia, population 2400, the young volunteer played his guitar and picked his banjo. While visiting a store on Bull Creek to find musicians to play at a gathering at the new library, he met Christian Bailey, an old banjo player who showed him seven handcrafted fretless banjos hanging on his cabin wall. This chance meeting bent Michael's life to traditional music and led to field recordings in the Library of Congress.

Michael registered voters in the deep South and learned family tradition as his minister father toiled in racially integrating the Methodist Church in Washington, DC, and Maryland. At a New York State festival, Michael first encountered the hammered dulcimer ("sweet sound" in Latin and Greek), an ancient stringed instrument played across all of Eurasia and the ancestor of the piano. Only a handful of North American hammered dulcimer players were left. Mesmerized and captivated by the haunting sound of the instrument, Walt took up the dulcimer, placing it in the center of his Appalachian music ensembles, and within ten years



Blues legend John Hammond wails at Common Ground's 2012 summer session

was performing at the Closing Ceremonies of the Winter Olympics to a television audience of 900 million. Now in his sixties, Walt Michael is regarded as the foremost American player of the hammered dulcimer which in the United States is heard mainly in traditional roots music, his forte.

After 25 years recording and performing across North America and Europe, Michael founded Common Ground where people learn traditional arts and engage in cross-cultural dialog.

Sign-ups for Common Ground 2013, which will run from June 30 through July 14, will begin March 15<sup>th</sup>. Visit [common-groundonthehill.org](http://common-groundonthehill.org) for more.

### 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

erty, having no experience of it. Then I was not happy or contented: every time I saw a white man I was afraid of being carried away. I had two sisters carried away in a chain-gang — one of them left two children. We were always uneasy. Now I've been free, I know what a dreadful condition slavery is. I have seen hundreds of escaped slaves, but I never saw one who was willing to go back and be a slave. I have no opportunity to see my friends in my native land. We would rather stay in our native land, if we could be as free there as we are here. I think slavery is the next thing to hell. If a person would send another into bondage, he would, it appears to me, be bad enough to send him into hell, if he could."

Of her unwavering determination, Tubman said, "I started with this idea in my head, there's two things I've got a right to, and these are Death or Liberty. One or the other I mean to have. No one will take me back alive; I shall fight for my liberty, and when the time has come for me to go, the Lord will let them kill me."

For more, see the *Free Press* editorial on the following page.

## Mississippi Ratifies 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 2013

It took a while, 148 years to be precise, but on February 7, Mississippi got around to ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment, yes, the one which on December 12, 1865, outlawed slavery as the constitutionally required three-fourths of state legislatures had agreed to ratification. It took an immigrant to get it done in Mississippi.

After votes stretching back decades refusing to ratify, the state legislature finally voted for ratification in 1995 but the paperwork which was supposed to be forwarded to the United States Archivist to make Mississippi's ratification official was then mysteriously shelved. Enter Dr. Ranjan Batra, an Indian immigrant and associate professor of neurobiology and anatomical sciences at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

After viewing *Lincoln* last year, Batra became curious as to how quickly the Thirteenth Amendment had been ratified and when each state had done so. He found that 49 states had ratified, most recently Kentucky in 1976, but not yet Mississippi. Batra and a friend contacted Mississippi Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann who agreed to finally file the paperwork.

Long the international whipping boy for the worst of racism, Mississippi today boasts of more African-American elected officials than any other state, integrated universities where governors once stood in the doorway to deny entry to African-Americans, and a more enlightened attitude than a few northern states today.

But Mississippi still moulders rock bottom in poverty, obesity, human development and black-white disparity, and has the next highest incarceration rate, with three-fourths of its inmates black, still providing cheap labor antebellum style.

At least officially if not entirely in spirit Mississippi has now banned slavery. Said Batra, "Everyone here would like to put this part of Mississippi's past behind us."

### Free Press Publisher Honored

*Underground Railroad Free Press* publisher Peter H. Michael has been named by African Diaspora World Tourism to *Who's Who In Black Cultural Heritage*. Honorees will be recognized at an April 27 gala in Atlanta. Others being honored are Congressman John Lewis, Dr. Julius Garvey, and Emmy-awarded Monica Pearson.

## Editorial: A Most Exemplary American

On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the American icon Harriet Tubman, no figure among the uncounted heroic souls of the Underground Railroad, the institution called the war for the soul of America, is better remembered 160 years later than is Harriet Tubman.

After fading for close to a century, recognition of the moral example which Tubman set as Underground Railroad conductor and safe-house operator has grown rapidly since the national resurgence of Underground Railroad interest swelled about fifteen years ago.

In 1990, Tubman's descendants persuaded Congress to declare March 10 as an annually observed Harriet Tubman Day, and on the same day, Canada began observing Harriet Tubman Day. In 2000 Baltimore's Louis Fields persuaded the Maryland legislature to become the first state to do the same. After several attempts in recent years, Maryland's and New York's Senators have reintroduced a bill in the 2013 Congress to establish Harriet Tubman National Parks on Maryland's Eastern Shore where Tubman was born in 1822 and escaped slavery in 1849, and at Auburn, New York, where she lived out her life after the Civil War. In 2012, Maryland passed legislation to commission and donate a Tubman statue to the new National Capitol Visitors Center.

Not as well remembered among Tubman's Underground Railroad accomplishments are those over the last half century of her long life.

During the Civil War, she became the first American woman to lead troops when she captured plantations on South Carolina's Combahee River, in one week freeing over 700 slaves, more than twice as many as she had liberated during her decade on the Underground Railroad.

For most of the rest of her life, Tubman made her living here and abroad as one of her era's most sought-after speakers. Overcoming obstacles of race and gender, it took her 30 years until 1895 to receive her soldier's pension, using it to realize her long-held dream of a home for elderly indigent women which she operated in Auburn. By her eighties, Tubman herself was cared for there as in her photograph on page 1 here.

Aged 91 or thereabouts, Harriet Tubman died at the home on March 10, 1913, at the time one of her nation's most revered figures, literally a legend

in her own time, and the last major figure of the Underground Railroad to die.

With her passing, Americans' memories of the Underground Railroad began to ebb until by the 1960s only one in five students was receiving any instruction about the Underground Railroad from kindergarten through graduate school. Beginning in the 1960s, elementary and high school teachers and then entire school districts were the first to begin reawakening the North American memory of the Underground Railroad. Research through one of the annual *Free Press* surveys of the international Underground Railroad community showed that by the decade of the 2000s over 90 percent of American and Canadian school children were receiving instruction on the Underground Railroad, up from 20 percent at best 40 years before.

A spark that went far in rekindling the nation's consciousness of the Underground Railroad is credited to Anthony Cohen whose 1995 walk of the route of his Underground Railroad fugitive ancestor from Maryland to Canada was reported in a seminal *Smithsonian* article.

By 1998, the federal government had established the first of three Underground Railroad programs, the National Park Service's Network to Freedom. The two others are run by the Smithsonian Institution and the Department of Education. In 2004 the centerpiece of the international Underground Railroad renaissance, the superb new National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, was dedicated in Cincinnati. In 2005 Fergus Bordewich's definitive Underground Railroad history, *Bound for Canaan*, was published, and the National Abolition Hall of Fame was established in Peterboro, New York. In 2006, *Underground Railroad Free Press* began publication becoming the most read Underground Railroad news publication within two years, now with about 80,000 readers. Its central international registries of Underground Railroad organizations and events, *Lynx* and *Datebook*, were launched in 2006, followed in 2008 by the Free Press Prizes, the Underground Railroad community's top awards.

Perhaps what has reacquainted the public with the Underground Railroad more directly than anything has been owners of Underground Railroad safe-houses and routes who have put their sites on the Internet and site maps, and opened

*Please see Still Leading, page 5, column 2*

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## Westmoreland

ing to the announcement President Lincoln made to the Congress after the 1862 battle at Antietam, Maryland, that he would emancipate enslaved people in the states that were in rebellion to the United States in January 1863. The Black church became the theological channel through which 250 years of hoped-for deliverance would be dressed in the worship style unique to Africans in America. The Black church in the North, the slave streets on the plantations of the South, the Parade Ground of the First South Carolina African Troops at Beaufort, South Carolina, became places where Blacks celebrated emancipation.

It was in the Black church where the watching, the praying, the waiting for midnight took on its own style that continues until today at Bethel AME Church in Baltimore, Maryland, and is reflected in song and prayer across America:

“Watchman from the East, what time is it?  
It is 3 minutes to Midnight, and all is well.  
Watchman from the West, what time is it?  
It is 2 minutes to Midnight and all is well.  
Watchman to the South, what time is it?  
It is 1 minute to Midnight, and all is well.  
Watchman to the North, what time is it?  
It’s Midnight, It’s Midnight”

A December 31, 2006, *New York Times* article attempted to link the Night Watch tradition of the Methodist Church established by John Wesley but ignored the impact of race and slavery on Blacks in the White Methodist church. When Richard Allen, Absalom Jones and others established the African Methodist Episcopal church, they took with them the Methodist discipline; they took the Christian Bible; they took the weapon of the powerless—faith. Having been in the storm too long, having stood in the slave balcony in the North and South, and having been denied the opportunity to shout in the White Methodist church in Cincinnati, the Black church turned inward. It used the discipline, the Bible, and the drama of the coming of emancipation to further create a new Black worship experience the Emancipation Proclamation heralded. The crossing of chained ancestors was heralded, they believed, by the parting of the waters so that the despised in America could go free. The raw emotional power of the voices of many of the four million enslaved Blacks on that “New Year Morning” was heard in Manchester, England, by working class Whites, and in a matter of days they too celebrated our freedom, celebrated the bond of the powerless.

Henry Adams wrote to his brother Charles from England that, “The Emancipation Proclamation has done more for us here [the U.S. was seeking to prevent England and France from supporting the Confederacy in the Civil War] than all our former victories and all our diplomacy.” The moral high ground the United States gradually gained by sharing the bounty of freedom with Black people became believable to a growing number of observers around the world.

At the Israel Bethel Church in Washington, DC, Rev. Henry Turner lead a service that was reflective of what was going on, and goes on until this day, where Black people purge their demons, dance, shout and speak of their fears and pain. As Reverend Turner read the Emancipation Proclamation, “Men squealed, women fainted, dogs barked, white and colored shook hands, songs were sung.” In Boston a Black minister who stayed with his congregation rather than join Frederick Douglass, Harriet Beecher Stowe and William Lloyd Garrison at Tremont Temple, was heard to exclaim, “Brothers and Sisters, tomorrow will be the day for the oppressed. But we all know dat

evil is round de President. While we set here dey is trying to make him break his word. But we have come to dis “Watch Night” ter see he does not break his word.”

The [preliminary September, 1862] Emancipation Proclamation freed no one, but it started an irreversible tide that drowned slavery as the clock moved closer to midnight December 31, 1862. Through the euphoria of the anticipation, the expectation of terror of the backlash from White America to Black freedom that would lead to the creation of state sponsored apartheid and segregation, Black America would go to church that night for remembering, for renewal and a return to the front line of the battle for the Dignity of Man and Woman. In each city in America, December 31<sup>st</sup> finds millions of Africans in America watching, waiting and praying for the balance of freedom still denied.

There are voices in America that express little patience with remembering enslavement, emancipation, Civil Rights and the pain and discord that came to individuals who pursued remedies to cure those deficiencies. There is a mindset that says, “We should move on.” Yet there is a truthful reality that children in American are victims of neglect and violence, and young women in particular are unwilling victims of the sex industry. People of African descent constitute twelve percent of the population, but Jonathan Langston Chism points out that “there is a child poverty phenomenon that begins in the cradle and surges almost nonstop through a pipeline that funnels too many Black youth down the road to prison.” In today’s America over one million Black males are in prison or under the supervision of federal, state and local parole or probation systems. It is our belief that in the tradition of Watch Night and the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, the sesquicentennial observance of 2013 of “How We Got Over” should continue and be renewed each January first until the last of us is free.

## Still Leading

their properties to public tours. The most authentic we have seen is Dobbin House in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. It is hard to count how many Underground Railroad sites have been opened or listed but it now would be well into three figures. To locate and learn about sites, use the maps of MapMUSE ([find.mapmuse.com/map/underground-rr](http://find.mapmuse.com/map/underground-rr)) and PBS ([pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/interactive-map/abolitionists-map](http://pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/interactive-map/abolitionists-map)).

The public now enjoys a network of Underground Railroad sites open to the public, excellent histories, biographies and novels, the grand Freedom Center, a hall of fame, federal, state and local programs, near universal instruction on the Underground Railroad, and even a burgeoning network of bicycle tours, all in the last 15 years. Perhaps the greatest gift of this resurgence is the recapturing of bedrock moral principles.

As a result of all of this, we now also see Underground Railroad figures being recognized in the pantheon of American greats, as it was they, more than the nation’s Nobelists, explorers, inventors or generals, who most clearly articulated the moral bedrock of what it means to be an American, no one more so than the modest, determined and inspiring Harriet Tubman. In this resurgence of interest in the Underground Railroad in which a growing number of all-but-forgotten American and Canadian heroes have become most deservedly reilluminated, it is Tubman who seems to have become the foremost symbol of the institution and of what it delivered to American morality.

Let us all honor the exemplary American, Araminta Harriet Ross Tubman Davis, this and every March 10.