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Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

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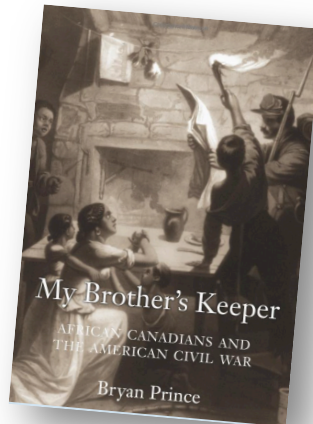
With *My Brother's Keeper*, Bryan Prince Turns Out Another Eye-opener

Award-winning Canadian author Bryan Prince has turned out another in his growing series of Underground Railroad books, this one perhaps his best yet. His recently released *My Brother's Keeper: African Canadians and the American Civil War* is a history of American Underground Railroad freedom seekers who had reached safety in Canada before the Civil War going back across the border and helping the Union to fight the war.

Through the stories of individuals, *My Brother's Keeper* portrays shared experiences of many former slaves leaving their freedom to take part in the Civil War. Prince's research uncovered 1,100 blacks who came to Canada, then returned to serve in the war. Said Prince, "I wanted to know about every single one of them."

It strikes him as incredible how people who found freedom and started a new life in Canada life risked it all to go back and fight. "It just shows how deeply slavery was engrained in their being, and their desire to do something against it. It meant so much to them to go back and be a part of eradicating what they had come from."

Bryan Prince is among North America's foremost researchers and authors on the Underground Railroad, slavery and abolition. His previous books include *One More River to Cross*, *A Shadow on the Household*, and *I Came as a Stranger*. Prince and his wife Shannon are in demand throughout North

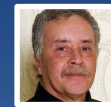


America as lecturers, and were recipients of the 2011 Hortense Simmons Prize for Advancement of Knowledge awarded by *Underground Railroad Free Press*.

Bryan Prince is a descendent of Underground Railroad freedom seekers. Shannon Prince is Curator of the Buxton Museum and National Historic Site. The couple lives near North Buxton, Ontario.

He sits on the board of the museum, and has served as consulting editor with England's Adam Matthew Publications Project on Slavery, Abolition and Social Justice, and as member of the Ontario Bicentenary Commemorative Committee on Abolition of the Slave Trade, the International Underground Railroad Heritage Program, Ontario's Underground Railroad Sites Program, and York University's Harriet Tubman Institute.

IN THIS ISSUE



Canadian author Bryan Prince tells of freedom seekers who made it to Canada, then went back to fight for the Union in the Civil War.

1



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1



Who are you, "Hope Winters"? We are looking for a mystery contributor with a touching story.

2



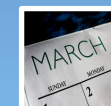
Three are granted pardons, but 171 years late.

2



Opportunities: List an organization or event, search the *Free Press* archives, submit an article or ad, read our annual survey reports, and more.

3



Three authors publish two closely related books at the same time. One of our reviewers looks into it.

3

Honor a Person or an Organization With a 2015 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.

Past winners have been honored for discovering or preserving Underground Railroad sites and artifacts, founding or leading organizations, writing books, performing research, and Underground Railroad promotion. Artistic accomplishment, official in-

terest, legislation and financial support may also be considered.

Individuals and organizations from any country are eligible for nomination. **Nominating is easy.** Just download a nomination form from our website, complete it, and email it to us at Publisher@urrFreePress.com. The 2015 nomination deadline is June 30. Visit urrfreepress.com/#prizes for more information and to view past winners.

"Hope Winters," Are You Out There?

An Appeal from *Free Press* Publisher Peter H. Michael

In the 2014 survey of the international Underground Railroad community, *Free Press* departed for a year from our standard format by polling on economic disparity, currently a hot topic in the United States. As with all *Free Press* surveys, the 2014 survey was anonymous with no way to identify respondents. Readers can view results at our website.

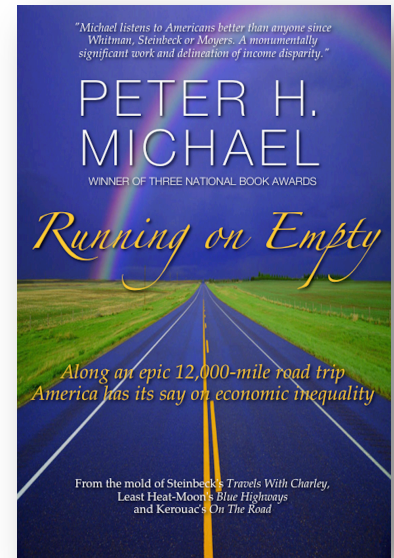
Near the end of the survey we asked, "Please feel free to provide any comments that you would like to offer." Among the many survey-takers who responded to this question, one in particular stood out with a heart-felt description of her deteriorated economic situation.

This eloquent statement from an unknown became a key first-person example cited in my forthcoming book, *Running on Empty: Along an Epic 12,000-Mile Road Trip America Has Its Say on Economic Inequality* which ex-

poses thirty years of growing United States economic disparity and how the ultra-rich and largest corporations caused it by purchasing legislation through "campaign contributions." In the book, I've called this survey-taker "Hope Winters," (as opposed to Hope Springs.)

"Hope," so moving was your plight and expression that I'd very much like to know how you are doing now. At 537 words, yours was by far the longest response. It truly stood out. You ended with, "I don't know the answer. How I wish I did. I can't go on much longer like this. My one saving grace is that I paid off the mortgage before all of this happened."

If you would like to remain anonymous, that's fine, and that is what you were promised. If you would like to provide an update, you may do so anonymously or by name by emailing me at publisher@urffreepress.com.



Coming in Spring 2015

Illinois Governor Pardons Three 1800s Abolitionists

In part, this article is based on reporting by the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (December 31, 2015) and the *Galesburg, Illinois Register-Mail* (January 5, 2015).

As his term was coming to an end last New Year's Eve, outgoing Illinois Governor Pat Quinn pardoned posthumously three Illinoisans who had been Underground Railroad safe-house operators and abolitionists in the 1800s.

Getting the pardon requests in front of the governor came about through the work of Free Press Prize Judge Owen Muelder and Illinois Lieutenant Governor Sheila Simon filing petitions on behalf of the three pardoned: father and son Julius and Samuel Willard of Jacksonville, Illinois, and Dr. Richard Eells of Quincy. In 1843, all three were caught harboring freedom seekers and convicted. Eells was fined \$400. Illinois had abolished slavery in 1824 but in 1843 federal law still prohibited assisting freedom seekers in all states.

Said Governor Quinn, "These early warriors for freedom put everything on the line to help their fellow man, and their civil disobedience paved the way for civil rights. Clearing their criminal records 171 years later shows how far we have come, but reminds us all that we should fight injustice wherever we find it."



Dr. Richard Eells

Muelder was particularly instrumental in the Eells pardon because of a connection between the two men. Muelder heads the Galesburg Colony Underground Railroad Freedom Station at Knox College; Eells was aided in his flight from Quincy to Chicago by Knox College trustee, the Rev. Samuel G. Wright. A few years ago, Eells' Quincy home was declared a national Underground Railroad historic site.

In praising Governor Quinn for pardoning Eells and the Willards, Muelder observed, "It's an effort on their part to pardon people who were in

fact on the right side of history. Here were people who in the ultimate schemes were committed to doing the right thing no matter what the circumstances were. It's important for us to remember even in this day and age that there's more slavery in the world than at any time, as the population has expanded."

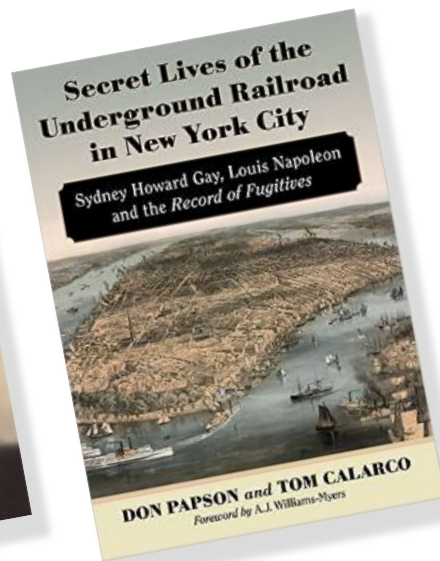
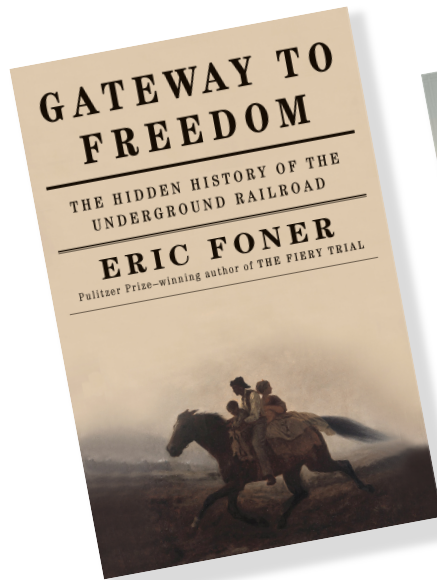
Taking notice of the pardons, Sean Tenner, cofounder of the Abolition Institute, a Chicago-based nonprofit organization which works to fight modern-day slavery, observed that, "Honoring these abolitionists is the right thing to do for their families and is helping to energize a new generation of Illinoisans to honor their legacy by fighting against human trafficking and modern-day slavery."

Well Worth a Look

Visit Medium.com to view or download White House photographer Pete Souza's photographs of the historic 50th anniversary march across the Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, on March 7, 2015

In your browser's address bar enter <https://medium.com/@WhiteHouse/behind-the-lens-selma-50-years-later-68bf9a3a70>, or at medium.com, click the search icon, then enter Behind the Lens.

Two Important New Books on the Underground Railroad in New York City Complement One Another



Reviewed by Owen Muelder

Because helping escaping slaves was illegal, the vast majority of those who acted as part of the Underground Railroad movement did so in secret or in the shadows. It was dangerous to record this activity for to do so could leave operators vulnerable to fines, arrest, and harassment. Generations of historians have been reluctant to examine Underground Railroad history because finding hard evidence regarding the topic has been difficult to uncover. There were, fortunately, some excellent first-hand accounts written before the Civil War, but more stories were recalled after the war ended. Many of these reminiscences were embellished, inflated, nostalgically recalled, or simply not true. In addition, the majority of fugitive slaves directly involved were illiterate, so their stories were usually reported second or third hand making many of them difficult to confirm. But, a renewed interest about the Underground Railroad on the part of professional historians, museum directors, preservationists, independent scholars, and the National Park Service has occurred over the last 25 to 30 years. This has taken place primarily due to the discovery of accurate data, first-hand records, diaries, and other correspondence. New biographies about Underground Railroad “carriers” and books and articles detailing their involvement have been published. There have also been first-rate Underground Railroad books recently released that are

focused on specific states or regions within states throughout the North. Additionally, the publication of Fergus Bordewich’s *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America* (HarperCollins, 2005) gave readers the best single volume ever written about the Underground Railroad throughout most of the nation. Bordewich’s scholarship brought to light long buried information, new analysis, and valuable insight regarding the movement’s impact on politics, religion, and the nation’s conscience.

Two recent books address the Underground Railroad saga, emphasizing its workings throughout the eastern United States especially concentrating on its operation in New York City. I highly recommend Eric Foner’s *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2015) and Don Papson and Tom Calarco’s *Secret Lives of the Underground Railroad in New York City: Sydney Howard Gay, Louis Napoleon and the Record of Fugitives* (McFarland, 2015). Each book represents an outstanding contribution to our understanding of this clandestine system.

Eric Foner is one of our most respected historians. The fact that this Pulitzer Prize-winning author has addressed the Underground Railroad underscores the legitimacy of the topic which is most welcome to scores of historians who have studied or are currently research-

ing the subject. Foner, in his introduction, praises the fact that, “... the Underground Railroad has enjoyed a resurgence as a focus of public history.” He expertly tells the Underground Railroad story and reveals the extent to which its operation must be understood through its relationship to the broader

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Books

Abolitionist Movement. The establishment of the American Anti-Slavery Society, the crisis that occurred when that organization split apart, and the Anti-Slavery crusades' drift into a political direction in the 1840s and '50s are expertly covered. Most important is his description of the significance of vigilance committees established by blacks in northern cities. These committees raised money, demanded that legislators address the second-class citizenship of African Americans, and blocked the return to slavery of both fugitive slaves and kidnapped free blacks. Vigilance committees cooperated with white abolitionists and Underground Railroad operatives in these urban centers in order to hide escaped slaves and to help usher them northward to Canada. The first such vigilance committee created was in New York City in 1835.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Southerners had become so outraged about the aid given to slaves who had absconded, that they insisted on including in the Compromise of 1850 a stronger Fugitive Slave Law that required federal judicial authorities in all states and territories to assist with the return of escapees. It also required ordinary citizens to help capture freedom seekers. Northern reaction to the act greatly aggravated tension between the North and South and helped to redouble Underground Railroad efforts. In New York City. However, politicians, powerful elites, and unscrupulous thugs looking to make money cooperated with Southerners to help catch fugitives because of close economic ties with the Cotton Kingdom. New York City was the broker of cotton to ports abroad. Consequently, it was especially important for Underground Railroad operators there to be vigilant about keeping their activities unknown. Accounts of the Underground Railroad in New York City in the early 1850s, according to Foner, are "virtually non-existent." But, he discovered descriptions of its operation in the city that were recorded by abolitionist Sydney Howard Gay, editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. The incredible detail, put down by Howard, of how this clandestine business worked in the mid-1850s is one of the most significant finds about the Underground Railroad ever uncovered. Included are the previously unknown efforts of black "agent" Louis Napoleon who worked as Gay's right-hand man. In his book, Foner in-

cludes useful charts and maps and he skillfully weaves into his text Gay's remarkably recorded revelations. In addition, Foner extends his analysis to explain the ways in which the Underground Railroad was an "interregional enterprise" connected to other key "stations" in the Northeast. He devotes particular attention to the way the New York City operation worked in concert with Philadelphia's Underground Railroad led by William Still. We learn that Still's Philadelphia records combined with Gay's New York City notes are "a treasure trove of riveting stories and a repository of insights into both slavery and the Underground Railroad." Gay's stories reveal the various ways slaves fled—by foot, carriage, sailboat, horseback, railroad cars, and hidden on coastal vessels. Some travelled alone, many in twos and threes, but others fled in larger groups.

Don Papson and Tom Calarco are Underground Railroad researchers, each of whom is a past recipient of an *Underground Railroad Free Press* Prize. Their new book, like Foner's, lays out the Underground Railroad story throughout the East. This work is organized as a documentary history and therein we find one of the major differences between the two books. Papson and Calarco meticulously present information that requires one to become familiar with numerous pieces of correspondence, sources, and accounts that are often quoted at length. They aptly use Sydney Howard Gay's records and notes to show New York City's connections to a wide-ranging network from eastern southern slave states into Pennsylvania, New York and New England. They discuss the overlapping relationship of black and white agents, but also present, as does Foner, a vivid account of the squabbling and infighting among various anti-slavery groups, particularly the loathing that existed between William L. Garrison's Boston abolitionist band and Lewis Tappan's New York City cohorts. (Both books disclose, however, that these differences were put aside when it was required to aid escaping slaves.) This book's description of Gay's relationship with Louis Napoleon is often quite moving and leaves no doubt about the central role this black agent played ushering fugitives out of the city towards safety. The authors illuminate the crucial part played by a number of militant black abolitionists and "station masters" like David Rug-

gles, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, Jermain W. Loguen and others, including the better known Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. An outstanding appendix gives the reader the opportunity to read in chronological order when, where, how, and to whom fugitives were sent. In some instances, this chart was put together by using New York City newspapers to pinpoint the arrival of ships captained by men who had a history of transporting escapees and matching this information with Gay's notations. Any student of the Underground Railroad will welcome the opportunity to pour over this appendix.

The most telling message that emerges from both books is the reminder that fugitive slaves demonstrated incredible courage when they fled. If a freedom seeker was captured, the consequences usually fulfilled their worst nightmare. Finally, the reader of these books, and any book about the Underground Railroad for that matter, must remember that countless fugitives made their way to freedom without receiving help from anyone along the way. Untold numbers of men, women, and children who bolted from the South in order to escape slavery did so by means of their own wit, guile, and unyielding determination even if it meant doing so alone.

Inevitably, mistakes and omissions are found in each book. Foner incorrectly maintains that the American Anti-Slavery Society, in 1836, "launched a massive campaign of printing and distributing Anti-Slavery materials." In fact, by 1835, leaders of the Society felt that its literature campaign was unsuccessful, so, in 1836, they reduced their publication spending in order to fund and hire more agents to lecture and organize state and local auxiliaries. Unfortunately, Papson and Calarco make no reference to either the Society's publication campaign or the remarkable effectiveness of that organization's agents, many of whom were trained by Theodore Dwight Weld in New York City itself in the mid 1830s. But these are minor objections, for each book is a blockbuster and should be added to the library bookshelves of important publications about the Underground Railroad story.

Owen Muelder, recipient of the 2014 Free Press Prize for Preservation, is Director of the Galesburg Colony Underground Railroad Freedom Center at Knox College.