



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

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New York City Safehouse to Be an Underground Railroad Museum

The following is adapted from an article in the *Brooklyn Reader* January 14, 2016, issue. Reprinted with permission.

In the fall of 2004, on the cusp of gentrification's most recent arrival to New York City's Brooklyn Borough, Joy Chatel—known to many in the community as “Mama Joy”—received a pink slip on her door notifying her of the City's intention to confiscate her property “for the betterment of the community.”

To Mama Joy's surprise and dismay, she, along with several other neighbors who lived along Duffield Street in downtown Brooklyn, suddenly had become the recipients of a legal action known as eminent domain.

The area where Mama Joy lived in downtown Brooklyn was developing fast, and the City had plans to build an underground parking lot.

The only problem was, like several of the homes on the block, Mama Joy's at 227 Duffield Street had a special history: During the 1800s, it was one of the safe-haven stops for freedom seekers moving through the Underground Railroad to freedom. Further, the former owners of Mama Joy's home were believed to be well-known and respected abolitionists.

Said Shawne Lee, Mama Joy's daughter “Her deceased husband, who owned the property with his first wife, had always told her that there was a strong possibility that abolitionists used to live in the house be-



cause his first wife's family would speak of it often.”

And there was other evidence said Lee, such as the Brooklyn Historical Society's old map of the area pointing to 226 Duffield Street as an Underground Railroad stop, and artifacts uncovered in the basement, including a sealed archway suitable as a hideaway and tunnel for runaway slaves.

So Mama Joy set out to fight the City. Her plan was to get proof of the home's abolitionist past, as well as rally public support, and then ultimately convince the City to allow her to turn the location into a museum and heritage center.

She met with University of Maryland
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See our past issues from July and September 2006, January and July 2007, and January 2008 when *Free Press* covered the battle with the City of New York which gained protection for the Chatel home. Click on Archives at urrfreepress.com.

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Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument Opens

On March 10, 2016, annually observed as Harriet Tubman Day in Maryland, the National Park Service opened the new Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument on Maryland's Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake near where Tubman was born and escaped from slavery.

Exhibits for the Monument's visitor center are being designed and posters of the exhibit design are in place for visitors to see. That evening a symposium was held on the new monument and Tubman's early life in the area.

Over the weekend, sites along the Harriet Tubman Byway through that part of Maryland and into Delaware were open, some sponsoring activities.

After years of the United States Congress failing to pass legislation to create a Tubman National Park, President Obama signed a presidential order creating the monument. Many of the country's national parks first existed as national monuments before being elevated in status. National parks enjoy stronger environmental and historical protection than do national monuments.

Underground Railroad History Project to Hold 15th Annual Conference in April

Organized by Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc., based in New York State, the 15th annual Underground Railroad Public History Conference will be held April 15-17, 2016. The conference is co-sponsored by Russell Sage College in Troy, New York. Drawing a multi-age, diverse audience from around the country, this conference provides the opportunity for new researched information to be brought forward, expanding the ever-growing body of the Underground Railroad.

The Educators' Workshop on Friday, geared toward educators but open to anyone interested, will address "Racism in America: Where Do We go From Here?" Facilitated by Alan Singer, PhD of Hofstra University and colleague April Francis, a middle school educator, this promises to be an engaging workshop. Alan Singer is author of numerous books that focus on social studies content instruction and slavery in New York. In addition to her middle school teaching schedule, co-facilitator April Francis has worked with numerous teachers from various New York universities and has presented an array of professional development workshops. She served on the Hofstra University research team with Dr. Alan Singer that developed the *New York State and Slavery: Complicity and Resistance* curriculum guide.

Barbara Smith and Angelica Clarke are the Opening Address speakers. *Moving Between: Intersectional Identities in the Struggle for Justice* will address how embracing multiple identities deepens effectiveness of political work. Smith is a Nobel Peace Prize nominee, author, activist, scholar and ground-breaker in the national dialogue on intersections of race, class, sexuality and gender. She was an early exponent of the African American women's literary tradition, Black women's studies and Black feminism. She is politically active in social justice movements and has edited three major collections on Black women.

Angelica Clarke, Executive Director at Albany, New York's Social Justice Center, is a community organizer currently organizing against prisons, police violence, and other forms of structural racism. She graduated from University at Albany in

2011 with a degree in political science and concentration in international relations. Her activism was inspired by Marx, Angela Davis, the Black Panthers, the poetry of Amiri Baraka and radical writers of many stripes. "I risk arrest because the pendulum in this country can swing closer to justice if we acknowledge the connections between our struggles."

Saturday is full of workshops, an interactive cultural performance, vendors, exhibitors, an art exhibit, and reception. Saturday's keynote speaker is Graham Hodges, PhD, the George Langdon, Jr. Professor of History and Africana Studies at Colgate University. He will speak on "The Underground Railroad in Colonial and Revolutionary New York: Redefining the Passage to Freedom." He is the author of many books including the prize-winning *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and The Underground Railroad in New York City* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010). He has directed five National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminars for Schoolteachers on Abolitionism and the Underground Railroad and will direct his sixth in 2016. Saturday workshop facilitators hail from California, Michigan, Maryland, Rhode Island and New York State. The "In Diversity is Richness: the Strength, Faith, and Hope of a People" art exhibit will feature Marcus Kwame Anderson and Daesha Devón Harris. "I believe that the arts can be a powerful vehicle for change and I often incorporate social commentary into my work," says Anderson. Harris writes, "...with ardent respect for a profound past, I challenge the viewer to consider the complexity of issues facing communities of color."

Sunday will feature a bus tour highlighting the Afro-Dutch heritage in New York's Capital Region in and around Albany. Jennifer Tosch is the founder of Black Heritage Amsterdam Tours, part of the Mapping Slavery Project initiated at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 2013. From this research *The Amsterdam Slavery Heritage Guide* was published in 2014 and includes researched information relating to several cities in the Netherlands. The Mapping Slavery Project has been expanded to include slavery and African heritage in New York's Hudson River Valley.

Conference Signup

undergroundrailroadhistory.org

or

Mary Liz Stewart

marylizugr@gmail.com

518.465.8708

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Peter H. Michael, Publisher
info@urfreepress.com
301 | 874 | 0235

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Ohio's Underground Railroad Foundation Begins 24th Year

One of an Occasional Series on Underground Railroad Sites and People

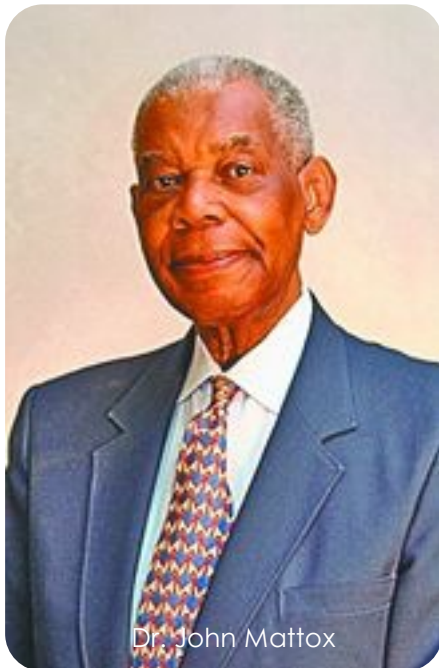
Twenty-three years ago, Dr. John Mattox had a vision of creating a museum of local Underground Railroad artifacts and history in eastern Ohio where he lives. After nearly a quarter-century of collecting, promoting and surviving a bad pipe-break flood, the Underground Railroad Foundation as Mattox named it leads a comfortable existence in the village of Flushing, Ohio, population 879.

The museum is a fine example of the kind of individual initiative which since the

1990s has reintroduced the Underground Railroad to Americans, Canadians, and many other parts of the world. Preceding the founding of *Underground Railroad Free Press*, the federal government's three Underground Railroad programs, the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, and nearly every university Underground Railroad program, Mattox's Underground Railroad Foundation deserves trailblazer credit for beginning the reawakening of North

America's memory of the Underground Railroad.

Located near the Ohio River where it abuts West Virginia and Pennsylvania, Flushing sits amidst a dense network of known Underground Railroad routes, safehouses, personages and history. For east-west travellers on Interstate Route 70, Flushing and the museum are only about twenty minutes away. Visit ugrrf.org for more.



Dr. John Mattox



Canada Underground Railroad Tour

Detroit's McMillan Tours is again offering its popular bus tour from Detroit to nearby Canadian Underground Railroad sites. McMillan's next tour will run from October 27 through 31, and includes two nights each at Niagara Falls and Toronto.

Tour leader Stewart McMillan has visited every Canadian province, all 50 US states, and 141 countries.

To learn more or to sign up, visit <http://mcmillantours.com>.

Mama Joy

historian Dr. Cheryl LaRoche, author of *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance*. When Dr. LaRoche saw the home she stated unequivocally that there was "definite reason to believe this was an abolitionist's home."

Mama Joy also learned that her area was actually a hub for freedom-seekers. In fact, two prominent churches in the area—Bridge Street Church and Plymouth Church—were well known for their pro-abolition efforts, providing asylum and resources to newly escaped slaves.

Then Mama Joy began to travel across the five boroughs and to Rhode Island and Canada seeking support of researchers in antebellum and postbellum history. She met James Driscoll at the Queens Historical Society, and with his help learned that abolitionists Thomas and Harriet Lee Truesdell had lived in her home.

The Truesdells owned a cotton company, and Harriet was the secretary and treasurer of a woman's anti-slavery movement. Apparently, the famous abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison, would stay at their house when he was in town. This they learned from a letter Garrison wrote to his wife where he mentions the Truesdells. In the letter, Garrison states he was happy he was able to stay with them and what a lovely couple they were.

Mama Joy presented this and other mounting evidence with each court visit. AKRF, the developer the City hired for the project, spent over \$500,000 and hired many professionals to discredit what she was saying, said Lee, but to no avail.

In the spring of 2007, with the help of Families United for Racial and Economic Equality, Mama Joy won against the City

and reversed eminent domain. A second victory came that September when Mama Joy helped secure the co-naming of the little corridor of Duffield Street between Fulton Street and Willoughby Avenue as "Abolitionist Place."

Mama Joy then got to work hosting tours inside the home to international and local visitors. The home also became a regular meeting place for arts performances and community organizing. Mama Joy's plans were to raise enough money to make it an official museum. And then, on January 7, 2014, Mama Joy passed away suddenly from interstitial pneumonia, sending shockwaves throughout the community.

"My mom was a warrior, no joke," said Lee. "She was a community activist, PTA president, and used to coach children's baseball. When we were growing up, we would have small miracles happen, mysterious things, things I just thought happened to people all the time. She would always get into serious situations and find her way out of it and land on top. So when she fell ill, I just thought she would get out of it. But it didn't happen."

Now Lee oversees 227 Abolitionist Place and carries her mother's torch. "I'm being approached constantly by developers, and I can easily walk away as a multi millionaire," said Lee. "But that's not what I want. What I want is what my mother wanted and that's to turn part of this home into a museum heritage center."

On April 17, Friends of 227 Abolitionist Place will present *Closer To Our Dream Performance Gala*, a fundraiser to continue Mama Joy Chatel's vision of turning her historic home into a museum and heritage center. Proceeds from the event will go toward legal expenses and developing plans of 227 Abolitionist Place.