



# UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad community

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## Trump Threatens Underground Railroad Sites by National Park Service Budget Cuts, Park Sell-offs, and Firing 2,000 Park Rangers

The Trump Administration's 2017 and 2018 budgets for the United States Department of the Interior and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have seriously cut protection, maintenance and operation of national parks in virtually every state including all cases of Underground Railroad sites and programs located within National Parks and National Monuments, and, in some cases, private-sector grantees of the National Park Service's Network to Freedom grant program. The president's proposed budget for the 2019 federal fiscal year beginning on October 1 of this year also proposes cutting 2,000 National Park Ranger positions.

Trump's proposed 31-percent EPA budget cut would make it impossible for the EPA to enforce the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts within parks

to protect and restore them from air and water pollution.

Trump's 12-percent cut to the Department of the Interior will halt or impede park construction programs, land acquisition, historic preservation, staffing and visitor services.

Says the National Park Conservation Association, "The budget proposal comes as the Park Service faces many challenges, exacerbated in part by years of underfunding. They include a \$12 billion deferred maintenance backlog, reduced staffing that has made it harder for parks to handle record-breaking crowds, and reductions in visitor services and interpretive programs essential to the park visitor experience."

John Garder, Director of Budget and *Please see Parks, page 3, column 1*

### IN THIS ISSUE



The Trump administration's attitude on parks could imperil the National Park Service's Network to Freedom program. 1



The rediscovery of a sunken ship in Alabama fits with one family's hand-ed-down story about their origin. 1



Take advantage of the *Free Press* prizes and annual survey coming up. 1



Five generations of Kentucky's Bransford family have worked as guides at Mammoth Cave since 1838. 2



The new National Civil Rights Trail debuts. 2



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## They Knew It: Found Alabama Shipwreck Proves Family Story

By Sandra E. Garcia and Matthew Haag

This article originally appeared in the January 26, 2018, edition of *The New York Times*. Permission to reprint requested.

Lorna Gail Woods had heard stories of the *Clotilda* since before she could speak. In the evenings, her grandmother would hold her on the porch and tell her the tale of how her great-great-grandfather came to Alabama on the last known slave ship to come to the United States.

They were brought by force, her grandmother would tell her, by an American businessman who just wanted to win a bet. Her great-great-grandfather Charlie Lewis was the oldest of 110 slaves bought in West Africa, chained in the hull of the *Clotilda*

and sailed across the Atlantic to the Mobile-Tensaw River Delta in Alabama in 1860. But after the slaves were unloaded, the crew — fearing that they would be caught, and then imprisoned or executed — burned the ship, and its wreckage was never found, so many people doubted the story.

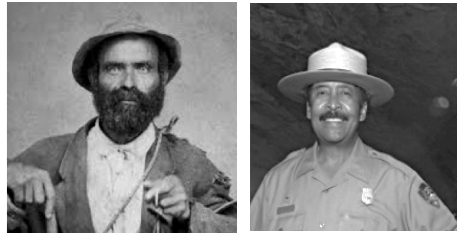
"My grandmother would tell us the story so we wouldn't forget and so that we could continue to tell the story," Woods, 69, said over the phone in a warm, Southern cadence.

But the story of the lost *Clotilda* — sometimes spelled *Clotilde* — would only grow, eventually giving scholars one of their most *Please go to Shipwreck, page 3, column 2*

## From Slavery to Freedom to Exclusion to Inclusion, Five Generations of One Family Have Bettered Mammoth Cave National Park

The following account is excerpted from *Running on Empty: Along an Epic 12,000-Mile Road Trip America Has Its Say on Economic Inequality*, Free Press publisher Peter Michael's 2015 book.

Thursday morning we showed up at the park's hotel to wait for the bus to take us to the "new" entrance to the cave, an opening in a hillside discovered in the 1800s. The new entrance, ancient of course, is several miles from the huge main entrance used since aboriginal times and within walking distance of the hotel. Early for our bus time, we toured the visitor center's very well done displays that included a detailed map of the 400 known miles of Mammoth Cave and a three-dimensional model of the part of the cave below the hotel. Unlike some of the world's other long caves involving branches of one long main horizontal or vertical tube, Mammoth Cave consists of a fairly localized maze of interlinked tubes collectively coming to 400 explored miles and counting. Imagine lace, randomly woven. There are several other cave networks like this not far from Mammoth Cave that are hypothesized to actually be part of the Mammoth Cave system, with their connections just not yet discovered. Spelunkers are continually exploring the mapped extremities of the Mammoth network and adding to its known mileage. The cave as currently known underlies parts of three Kentucky



Cave Guides Materson and Jerry Bransford

counties.

While we were waiting, National Park Service Guide Jerry Bransford came up and introduced himself. Mr. Bransford is a fifth-generation Mammoth Cave Guide who descends from Materson Bransford, one of the original guides when the cave first became commercialized for tours in 1838. Ranger Bransford had begun telling us the fascinating story of the tight relationship between the cave and his family when our bus was called and off we went for our tour. A few hours later after we returned, we spoke to Mr. Bransford again and heard the rest of his uniquely American story.

Quite a story it is. Native American artifacts dating back ten thousand years have been found in the cave. Early European settlers mined the cave's potassium nitrate deposits used to make gunpowder during the War of 1812. In the 1830s the cave became commercialized for guided tours that in mounting numbers drew the

curious including wealthy touring Europeans. The first Mammoth Cave Guide was Stephen Bishop, a slave who began work in 1838.

Shortly afterward, the enslaved Materson Bransford began work here, the first of five generations of the same family at Mammoth Cave, and the great-great-grandfather of today's Jerry Bransford. In a peculiar and sad situation that happened too often across the slave states, Materson Bransford was first "owned" by his white father, and then by his white half-brother. The five-generation line is Materson, Henry, Louis, David and Jerry Bransford. Well into the twentieth century when the cave was privately owned, many other related Bransfords also worked at Mammoth Cave, the men usually as cave guides, the women as domestic help in the enterprise's hotels and kitchens. In the late 1800s, white guides began to be hired but through the 1930s most of the guide staff were local black people including the Bransfords and a descendant of Stephen Bishop.

When an unmarried eighteenth century owner died, he willed his cave property and company to his nieces and nephews, specifying that, when they were gone, the entirety was to be auctioned. When the last of them passed away in 1929, the auction never took place as the Kentucky

*Please see Five Generations, page 4, column 2*

## New National Civil Rights Trail Covers 100+ Locations in 14 States

### One of an occasional series on Underground Railroad sites and people

On January 1, the 153<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, the U.S. Civil Rights Trail was officially announced to the public. The Trail comprises a collection of churches, courthouses, schools, museums and other landmarks, primarily in the Southern states, where activists challenged segregation in the 1950s and 1960s to advance social justice. The Trail is overseen by Travel South USA, the association of tourism departments of the 14 southern state governments.

The Civil Rights Trail got its start after former National Park Service Director Jonathan Jarvis encouraged the identification of surviving landmarks where major events of the civil rights era occurred, Georgia State University then identified 60 sites, and southern state tourism directors added 40 more.

Places where activists successfully sought equal access to public education, public transportation and voting rights comprise the Trail's theme, "What happened here changed the world."

Schools stretching from Topeka, Kansas, to Little Rock, Arkansas, to Farmville, Virginia, to South Carolina represent the end of racial segregation in public education, triggered by the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision used later by courts to dismantle other forms of segregation.

F.W. Woolworth lunch counters in Greensboro, North Carolina, and Nashville, Tennessee, where sit-ins by black college students in 1960 inspired a wave of similar nonviolent demonstrations, are featured on the trail. The Greensboro store is now a major civil rights museum,



and the Tennessee building now a restaurant and entertainment venue that attracts civil-rights pilgrims.

Most blacks in Deep South states were prevented from registering to vote. A voting-rights march in Selma, Alabama, that turned violent on the Edmund Pettus Bridge emboldened Congress to pass the 1965 Voting Rights Act. Visitors now walk across the bridge daily.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the most visi-

*Please go to Trail, page 3, column 3*

## Parks

Appropriations for the Association, states that, "The Administration's proposed budget is a non-starter for our national parks, our environment, and our cultural heritage, and should be dead on arrival in Congress. Agencies like the National Park Service and EPA cannot take care of our treasured landscapes and historical landmarks with further cuts to what are already shoestring budgets. The deep cuts to the Department of the Interior and key EPA clean water and enforcement programs demonstrate how irresponsible this budget is. The cuts to land acquisition, water restoration and historic preservation programs are nothing short of alarming. Cutting this funding fails to recognize how essential these programs are to protecting national parks, our natural resources and our cultural heritage."

Cuts are now impacting land acquisition that helps to protect parks from development within their borders. Entirely eliminated in the Trump budget is funding for the National Heritage Area program, Great Lakes, Chesapeake Bay and Everglades restoration, local input and environmental review.

Blogger, author and National Parks preservationist Audrey Peterman (LegacyOnTheLand.com) puts it well: "The assault of the Trump administration on our publicly-owned lands—suggesting that they view them mostly as assets to be converted to currency—is glaringly obvious. As we wrestle with the cynics who try to shift the ground under our feet, the public lands provide us with a foundation upon which we can ground ourselves. Our park rangers are examples of the best of the human spirit. Please take action today to protect our national parks and publicly-owned lands from those who only see the "price" they can produce, but miss their true value."

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## Shipwreck

detailed looks into the lives of Africans who were brought to the U.S. to live in bondage after an Alabama businessman attempted to smuggle slaves from Africa to the United States without being caught. [Slave importation had been outlawed in the United States since 1808.]

[In January], the story that Woods' family — and many like hers in Africatown, the historic neighborhood of about 2,000 on the shores of the delta just north of Mobile — had passed down for more than 150 years became much more real.

That month, Ben Raines, reporter for AL.com, published an article in which he told of finding the charred wooden remains thought to be the Clotilda.

"We know exactly who was on it. The names of all the slaves that were on it, the captives who were on it, were all recorded," Raines said in an interview. "It is the only group of people brought into the country through slavery where we know exactly where they were brought in, taken from in Africa, and ended up in the United States."

Archaeologists who visited the site said that based on the wreckage's dimensions and contents — including charred timber, and iron drifts — the remnants were most likely those of the slave ship.

"This is the proof we needed," Woods said. "I am elated because so many people said that it didn't really happen that way, that we made the story up."

Woods and other descendants said they were ecstatic about the news but still coming to terms with it. While the Clotilda had always been at the center of family lore, the common bond among neighbors in Africatown, they previously had to accept the story on faith.

About 10 of the 100 or so descendants of the Clotilda slaves who still live in Africatown gathered on Wednesday to discuss what should be done with the wreckage if it proves to be the Clotilda.

Should it be removed and restored? Should it stay where it is and the land be protected? Should the wreckage be placed in a museum?

"We want to tell the rest of our families about what happened over 150 years ago," Woods said. "We want to get some answers."

Lavon Manzie, a Mobile councilman who  
Please go to *Shipwreck*, page 4, column 1

## Underground Railroad Free Press® Independent Reporting on Today's Underground Railroad

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## Trail

ble leader of the movement, is represented in several states. His birthplace and gravesite are just steps apart in downtown Atlanta. His first church in Montgomery, Alabama, is where he led the successful bus boycott after the arrest of Rosa Parks. The Memphis church where he gave his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech the night before his assassination at the Lorraine Motel is a popular destination. The motel, expanded into the National Civil Rights Museum, is the most visited restored civil rights landmark in America. The Memphis museum will be the focus of the 50th anniversary of the death of Dr. King this year.

Four major museums were built to interpret the movement. U.S. Rep. John Lewis of Atlanta championed construction of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened to great acclaim in Washington, D.C., in 2016. The Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, now the centerpiece of a new national monument, faces the park where police used fire hoses and dogs in 1963 to terrorize student demonstrators. The Center for Civil and Human Rights is a major attraction in downtown Atlanta. The Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, which opened in Jackson last month, is the newest.

For details of the dozens of sites and interviews with foot soldiers and tour guides at some of the landmarks, visit [CivilRightsTrail.com](http://CivilRightsTrail.com).



## Shipwreck

represents Africatown, said the possible discovery of the Clotilda is welcome news in a part of Mobile that is often overlooked. Last year, an artist painted a mural of the slave ship on a wall in the neighborhood, a sign of the Clotilda's continued resonance in the community.

Manzie said the Clotilda slaves represented what was best about his state and America. They came against their will and did not know English or understand American culture. Still, he said, they transformed Africatown into a thriving community of agriculture, schools, churches and community centers.

"It's a story of resilience and self-preservation," he said. "If you consider the circumstances of what these individuals had to learn and grow from and then reach the highest of success they can achieve, it is an amazing story."

Woods remembers the story of how her great-great-grandfather Charlie Lewis came on the Clotilda. As a child, Woods learned that Lewis was the oldest slave on the ship, and that he was known as chief of the Tarkbar Tribe.

"Charlie only spoke the African language, so he passed the story down to his son Joe Lewis," Woods said. She said that he learned to read and write at the Old Union Baptist Church in Africatown and recorded the story.

The Old Union Baptist Church has served as a hub for the community. Several slaves who arrived on the Clotilda were founding members of the church.

Liston Portis has lived in Africatown for 55 years and sees the story of the Clotilda as the history of the town.

"I was very excited and happy that they found the ship because I had heard about the ship all my life," Portis said. "For someone to locate it, it makes our story real and true."

Portis, a retired juvenile detention supervisor, is not related to any of the slaves who arrived on the Clotilda. But he said he knows the story because churches and schools in the community reinforce it.

"It is very important to know from whence you come," Portis said, "especially in the African-American community because we were not reading and writing, so our stories passed on molded us."

"To actually see our history and know where we come from specifically," Portis added, "it gives credence to our story."

## Five Generations

Congressional delegation persuaded the federal government to purchase the property for a national park. In September, 1936, five years before it would be officially designated as a national park, the Mammoth Cave property was placed under the operation of the National Park Service. Until then, many black guides continued working at Mammoth Cave including eight Bransfords who were grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Materson Bransford or of early Materson relatives.

But the National Park Service had other ideas. One by one in the late 1930s, black guides were told that they would not be hired by the federal government when Mammoth Cave became a national park. In the 1990s former National Park Service Director Robert Stanton, the first black to head the Park Service, reflected that "It would have been very doubtful that the Park Service would hire them in technical or semiprofessional positions such as park guides. African Americans might have been hired for maintenance, but the National Park Service and most agencies moved very slowly on improving their employment practices until major civil rights and equal-employment laws were passed in the 1950s and '60s."

In 1939, Louis Bransford, grandson of Materson and grandfather of Jerry, retired as the last of the cave's black guides. As author and former Mammoth Cave employee Joy Lyons puts it in her book, *Making Their Mark: The Signature of Slavery at Mammoth Cave*, "The day Louis Bransford walked to the office and turned in his key to the iron door guarding Mammoth Cave's entrance marked the end of 101 continuous years of Bransford guides at Mammoth Cave. His departure symbolized not only the end of an era, but the end of a way of life."

When the National Park Service made Mammoth Cave National Park official on July 1, 1941, Superintendent R. Taylor Hoskins hired an all-white crew. Thus the long mutually beneficial association between the local black community and Mammoth Cave was severed.

Things got even uglier. Using eminent domain, the government began buying up eighty-two square miles of land surrounding the cave and evicted 500 families, both black and white, many of whom had lived there since before Kentucky statehood in 1792. In such cases, the National Park Service has the option of allowing people to stay, perhaps with the

restriction that dwellings may be owned in the future only by descendants. In Mammoth's case, about 2,000 people were run off their ancestral land instead. Homes, farms, small businesses, churches, schools and cemeteries—their entire heritage—had to be left behind as they were forced off.

It took until the twenty-first century before Mammoth Cave National Park would mend its ways on race.

In 2004, three-quarters of a century after Louis Bransford saw the writing on the wall and retired on his own terms, Joy Lyons, who was in charge of hiring and training Mammoth Cave guides, had an idea. Lyons looked into who the modern-day descendants of the Bransfords might be, discovered Louis's grandson Jerry nearby, and offered him a job as a uniformed Seasonal Park Guide. Just retired, Jerry Bransford unretired and signed on with the National Park Service. Mr. Bransford, a dignified and well-spoken man, is a retired photographer of Dow Corning Corporation, past president of the NAACP chapter of Hardin County, Kentucky, and Deacon of Little Zion Baptist Church in nearby Glendale.

In our long conversation, Mr. Bransford said that going on seventy years later the few buildings that the park service did not demolish are nearly gone to decay with a very few preserved only for tourist gawking as a last look at an obliterated way of life. Old maps show the locations of cemeteries but most have not been tended for years and have gone back to nature, with descendants cut off from being able to visit the graves of their ancestors. Mr. Bransford knows the location of his ancestors' cemetery and, having re-blazed an old trail, periodically makes his way through the deep local forest to clear and tend the graves. When the National Park Service learned of his devotion, it asked him not to look after the cemetery any longer but so far has not outright prohibited it. There are over a dozen old cemeteries in the park and it is hard to see how any harm could be done by letting volunteers, especially descendants, maintain them.

The callousness practiced by the National Park Service at Mammoth Cave National Park since 1940 amounts to the worst of heavy-handed bureaucracy and unfeeling community relations. But Jerry Bransford is upbeat. Of those he works with at the park, he says, "They are decent people here, and I try to reciprocate."