



Editorial

When did you or your organization begin Underground Railroad work?

In our next issue, we'll feature a guest article on the resurgence of Underground Railroad interest beginning about 15 years ago. As part of this effort at recording recent Underground Railroad history, we're asking you to let us know when you or your organization first got to work on the Underground Railroad.

After Harriet Tubman's passing in 1913, an ebbing in the public's memory of the Underground Railroad set in. Because it was illegal in its day, most of what has been passed down about the Underground Railroad has been done so orally in families and through property owners.

Research conducted by *Underground Railroad Free Press* has shown that by the 1960s, only 20 percent of Americans had ever received any instruction from grade school through college about the Underground Railroad.

Beginning in the 1960s, teachers on their own began including the Underground Railroad in their teaching. The practice spread when schools districts mandated Underground Railroad instruction until, by the 1990s, over 80 percent of United States students were receiving instruction about the Underground Railroad.

The past 15 years have seen a broad revival of Underground Railroad interest. Perhaps the spark was Anthony Cohen's 1996 walk from Maryland to Canada retracing the route of his freedom seeker ancestor. *Smithsonian's* article on Cohen's walk seemed to ignite a wildfire of institutional effort.

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Underground Railroad Free Press®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

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Rare Blockson Collection to Smithsonian Museum

Underground Railroad historian Charles L. Blockson has donated his priceless collection of Harriet Tubman memorabilia to the Underground Railroad program of the National Museum of African-American History and Culture, a unit of the Smithsonian Institution. The donation was made on March 10, the 97th anniversary of Tubman's death.

The 39 items were willed to Blockson by Mariline Wilkins, a great grand-niece of Tubman, and include Tubman's signed hymnal, a shawl given to her by Queen Victoria, a framed portrait, one of the few known photographs of Tubman, her wooden-handled knife and fork, and three photographs of her 1913 funeral.

Blockson, 76, has spent a lifetime collecting African-Americana, much of it rare. The donation of his collection of over 20,000 items seeded Temple University's Blockson Afro-American Collection which now contains hundreds of thousands of items, the most extensive collection of its kind anywhere.

Said Blockson of his being willed the Tubman collection, "I was shocked. Then I prayed and put them in a vault. Then I put them under my bed and her spirit was with me."

Of the acceptance ceremony, Museum Direc-

tor Lonnie Bunch stated, "I knew that this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity because I was viewing material that I never expected to see, material that few knew existed. Each object in this collection humbled us, excited us and moved us to tears. And then, Dr. Blockson uncovered Harriet Tubman's personal hymnal, and I think many of us [were overcome]."

The Tubman Collection will be on display when the museum opens on the National Mall in Washington, DC, in 2015.



Museum Director Lonnie G. Bunch, Rep. Robert A. Brady (D. Pa.), Charles L. Blockson and the Tubman Hymnal

Harriet Beecher Stowe Center Announces New Prize

The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center has announced the inauguration of the Stowe Prize for Excellence in Writing to Advance Social Justice. The prize will be awarded biennially.

The Stowe Prize carries a \$10,000 award recognizing a United States author whose writing makes a tangible impact on a social justice issue critical to contemporary society. Named in honor of Stowe, the prize announcement observes the 200th anniversary of her birth. Email StowePrize@StoweCenter.org for more. The nomination deadline is June 1.

Your Opinions Needed: 2010 Free Press Survey and Prize Nominations Now Open

Nominations Welcome

Nominations for the 2010 Free Press Prizes remain open through June 30. *Free Press* annually awards three prizes for contemporary work in leadership, preservation and the advancement of knowledge in the international Underground Railroad community.

Go to urrfreepress.com to download a nomination form or learn more about the prizes.

Stowe's 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is regarded as the most influential book ever written by an American. It was a proximate cause of the Civil War and Emancipation, has been published in 60 languages and is still in print.

The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center preserves and interprets Stowe's Hartford, Connecticut, home and the Center's historic collections, promotes discussion of her life and work, and inspires commitment to social justice and positive change.

Take the 2010 Free Press Survey

Free Press conducts annual surveys of the Underground Railroad community. If you did not receive an invitation to take the 2010 survey, just click on the link below or copy and paste it into your browser's address bar.

Or visit our website, urrfreepress.com, click on *Surveys* and then click on *Take the 2010 Survey*.

Survey link: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=Blbc6NlYtCXdrL2O_2bIN2cA_3d_3d

The federal government established three Underground Railroad programs beginning with the National Park Service's Network to Freedom in 1998. Cincinnati's National Underground Railroad Freedom Center opened in 2004. *Underground Railroad Free Press* began publication in 2006 and inaugurated the Free Press Prizes in 2008. These anchor institutions serve a growing list of modern localized Underground Railroad efforts.

So back to our question: how and when did you or your organization get going? Let us know at editor@urrfreepress.com.

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Underground Railroad Free Press®

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Today's Underground Railroad

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Recent Underground Railroad Books and Articles

Underground Railroad writers have been busy lately with several new books, articles and a blog which we think you will like.

Graham Hodges' biography, *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City*, is the first on Ruggles, well known in his time as the publisher of hundreds of articles and editorials in *The Emancipator* and *The Liberator*. From 1834 through the end of the Civil War, Ruggles used his home, still standing at 36 Lispenard Street in Manhattan, as a safe-house from which he sent on more than 600 freedom seekers including Frederick Douglass.

After 1834 when Great Britain outlawed slavery in most of her colonies, its Caribbean possessions became a destination for United States freedom Seekers. Bahamian author Wm. J. Godfrey Eneas has written *The New Caribbean: A Region in Transition* tracing today's region in part from the heritage of freedom seekers.

There isn't much fiction written on the Underground Railroad but what there is tends to be good. *Redfield Farm* by Judith Coopey,

A Modern Canadian Struggle

By Lawrence Hall

Retired journalist Lawrence Hall Lives in Ontario, Canada, and is the descendant of two United States freedom seekers. This article is adapted from one in the March 6, 2010, issue of the Nova Scotia Chronicle Herald.

Viola Desmond went to a movie to put in time while her car was being fixed. The 32-year-old beautician bought a ticket and went into New Glasgow, Nova Scotia's Roseland Theatre. Desmond, a black businesswoman, took a seat on the theatre's main floor in the area set aside by a local bylaw for whites only. When she refused to move upstairs where blacks were ordered to sit, theatre management called police.

Reports indicate the New Glasgow police chief grasped the small woman by the shoulders, muscled her out to the theatre lobby and ordered that she be sent to the town jail. It was November 8, 1946, nine years before Rosa Parks defied authorities in Montgomery, Alabama, by refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man. Viola Desmond, after spending a sleepless night in a cell, appeared before a magistrate who found her guilty of failing to pay the extra tax of one cent charged to those seated in the downstairs section. She was fined \$20 plus \$6 in costs.

Many Canadians now will deny that segregation supported by laws once existed anywhere

descendant of Quaker safe-house operators in Pennsylvania, will be published by Indie Publishing Group in August. Her historical novel is based on her family's stories of her ancestors' Underground Railroad work at Redfield Farm in Bedford County, Pennsylvania.

Underground Railroad involvement of Quaker siblings Ann and Jesse Redfield leads to complications with their fellow Quakers, proslavery neighbors and fugitives they shelter. When grave disappointment shakes her, Ann turns to Josiah, the freedom seeker she shelters, leading to comfort and intimacy. The result, poignant and steeped in another time, resonates in today's world.

Tom Calarco's blogs might be making him today's most prolific Underground Railroad writer. His prize-winning work revealing the Underground Railroad in upstate New York is now followed by regular opinion pieces on various Underground Railroad topics at suite101.com. Search on Calarco there for a growing number of opinion pieces in Calarco's engaging style. He boasts that "footnotes are not used" in his under-a-thousand-words blog articles.

in their country but the truth, painful as it might be, is that segregation, and denial of access and equal opportunity were often a part of the black Canadian's life in the land of the North Star. Even before Viola Desmond was penalized in the court of Nova Scotia, she had faced discrimination when she was denied access to a beautician school in Halifax. She travelled to the United States where she studied cosmetology at a college founded by C. J. Walker, America's first African-American female millionaire. Walker made her fortune by developing hair care products for black Americans.

After graduation Desmond returned to Halifax where she established her own hair salon and school, developing her own line of beauty products as well as crafting wigs. Her school's first class trained 15 black female students from all over Canada's Atlantic provinces. This all took place in the early 1940s when Viola Desmond succeeded in business, made a better-than-average living and was considered definitely unique. She was considered among black women "One of a kind". With the help of the Nova Scotia Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, she created opportunities that had been denied to blacks. Viola Desmond died on February 7th, 1965, at the age of 50. She is buried in Camp Hill Cemetery in Halifax.

The National Park Service's Network to Freedom program will hold its annual conference July 28-31 in Topeka, Kansas. The program features presentation of papers, panel discussions and local Underground Railroad site tours. Space is available. Visit ugrconference.org to register.