



Editorial

Underground Railroad Preservation Picks Up Steam But Not for Routes

As recently as five years ago, there wasn't a lot of good news to report about saving Underground Railroad sites from being lost to memory or to the elements. Typical for Underground Railroad safe-houses were demolition, deterioration, alterations into the unrecognizable or being forgotten altogether. Fates of Underground Railroad routes were even worse with "progress" paving them over or planting a mall or subdivision atop them.

Now, there is a budding and heartening movement toward recognizing the importance of restoring and preserving Underground Railroad sites. Gratifying are the growing private-public partnerships at work in site preservation.

In this issue of *Free Press* are two good examples of preservation and protection mounted by local groups in partnership with government. New York City's Hopper-Gibbons House is being saved through the efforts of neighbors and City government. The New Castle Courthouse has been restored by the State of Delaware with encouragement of a private historical society.

The 2008 *Underground Railroad Free Press Prize for Preservation* went to Maryliz and Paul Stewart who rescued and restored a safe-house with the help of the City of Albany, New York.

The safe-house of Maryland's Cooling Springs Farm, among the nation's most visited Underground Railroad sites, was restored by its owners over the past four years and protected by a State of Maryland conservation easement and a designation by Scenic America.

Among the best examples of forging public-private partnerships for Underground Railroad preservation are those of the energetic Judith Wellman, member of the Free Press Prize Panel of Judges, and her colleagues in upstate New York who have shepherded a number of joint preservation projects.

Sometimes it is government or the private sector alone which saves a site as when a local parks commission bought the original Uncle Tom's Cabin to keep

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Ceremony Honors Free Press Prize Winner David Anderson

David A. Anderson, Ph.D., 2008 winner of the *Underground Railroad Free Press Prize for Leadership In the Contemporary Underground Railroad Community*, was honored November 13 in a ceremony at Rochester, New York's Nazareth College where he is Community Scholar In Residence with the School of Education and College of Arts and Sciences.

You have done as much as anyone to assure that this noble moral enterprise takes its rightful place in history and in the hearts of today's and future Americans and Canadians."

At the ceremony, Nazareth College named an annual scholarship in honor of Dr. Anderson. David Anderson continues his life's work writing on the Underground Railroad and particularly his first love, often acting the Underground Railroad story on stage to school audiences.



Free Press Publisher Peter H. Michael confers the 2008 Leadership Prize on Dr. David A. Anderson

In presenting Dr. Anderson with his prize, *Free Press* publisher Peter H. Michael stated, "On behalf of the international Underground Railroad community, it is a delight to honor you for your many decades of work in rekindling awareness of the Underground Railroad.



Hopper-Gibbons Safe-House Gets Reprieve

In October, a group of neighbors and local historians secured a last-minute reprieve for the only documented Underground Railroad safe-house in Manhattan Borough of New York City. The current owners of Hopper-Gibbons House had sought to substantially modify the building and the City of New York had mistakenly issued a work permit for the changes.

James Gibbons in 1851. The Gibbons home is part of an elegant two-block oasis of town-houses built as a piece in 1847 and known as Lamaratine Place at the time.

According to local preservationists Julie Finch and Fern Luskin, the Gibbons family hosted abolitionists John Brown, William Lloyd Garrison, Lydia Maria Child, Lucretia Mott, Horace Greeley and many freedom seekers at dinners in the home.

Mobs of the 1863 Draft Riots, which lynched blacks and attacked the homes of abolitionists, assaulted the Gibbons home, threw furniture out the windows and set fire to several rooms. Gibbons daughters Lucy and Julia escaped only by scrambling over rooftops to the neighboring Hebrew Orphans Asylum.

Finch, Luskin and other preservationists are working with city government to protect the home by requiring that owner modifications conform to period architecture, and plan to apply for state and national landmark status for the entire Lamartine Place neighborhood. Shown here is Hopper-Gibbons House intact in about the 1930s and in its present condition. Ms. Luskin is in the later photograph. Visit "Fern Luskin" at YouTube for more.



The group's efforts got the permit revoked after a city review found that the architectural plans violated building and zoning codes.

The home, located at 336 West 29th Street in Manhattan, dates from 1847 and was pur-

Underground Railroad Free Press provided an endorsement for preservation of the prop-

it from developers in Maryland.

But safe-houses are faring far better than Underground Railroad routes in being identified, protected and preserved. This is due to some routes being obliterated by major thoroughfares or developments or these clandestine paths being hard to identify, but much is due simply to neglect and a concentration on safe-houses.

We encourage the burgeoning Underground Railroad preservation movement to begin identifying and seeking protection for Underground Railroad routes as it is so successfully doing with safe-houses.

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Delaware Courthouse In Preservation Award

The New Castle Historical Society of New Castle, Delaware, has conferred its top honor, the Bamberger Historic Preservation Award, to the State of Delaware for the State's restoration of the historic New Castle Courthouse shown here.



Now a museum operated by the State's Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs, the 1732 courthouse was reopened on September 28 after \$2.5 million in renovations. One of

Book Review: *River Jordan* Chronicles Heroic Escape

As novels on the Underground Railroad are scarce, most books which *Free Press* reviews are nonfiction but there are some very readable exceptions. In our May, 2007, issue, we reviewed David Durham's *Walk Through Darkness*, a stem-winder of Underground Railroad fiction. Lately we read Henry Burke's and Dick Croy's *The River Jordan*, another page-turner of Underground Railroad fiction now in its third printing.

As historical fiction, *The River Jordan* closely follows the true story of Jane, an enslaved woman from Virginia's Harness plantation who in 1843 led her seven children to freedom across the Ohio River — which freedom seekers likened to the biblical River Jordan — into Ohio and then to Canada. This classic tale of freedom seekers, their shelterers and conductors of both races vividly portrays the

Maryland and New York Senators Introduce Tubman Park Bill

Maryland Senators Barbara Mikulski and Benjamin Cardin and Senators Hillary Clinton and Charles Schumer of New York have introduced the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park Act to commemorate Tubman and her life in the two states. Similar legislation has been introduced by three House sponsors to establish a Tubman park in each state. All seven sponsors are Democrats.

The bills authorize \$11 million for construction of the Harriet Tubman State Park Visitors Center in Maryland and \$7.5 million for preservation and restoration of Tubman-related properties in Auburn, New York. Maryland's park will be at Tubman's birth place and escape site near Bucktown, Maryland, and New

the nation's oldest and most historic courthouses, the New Castle Courthouse served as Delaware's first court and state capitol, and was the site of the trial of famed Underground Railroad safe-house operator Thomas Garrett.

At the age of 60 in 1848, after years of aiding freedom seekers, Garrett was arrested, tried, convicted and fined \$5,400 which he wasn't able to pay. To collect the fine, the court confiscated Garrett's home, furnishings and blacksmithing tools. When the judge asked him after sentencing if he had anything to say, Garrett famously replied, "Friend, I have not a dollar in the world, but if thee knows a fugitive who needs a breakfast, send him to me." Within days, townspeople, black and white alike, donated materials for a new home and smithing tools to Garrett who went right back to aiding freedom seekers.

When Garrett died in 1871, his coffin was borne by 1,500 admirers, black and white alike, to his simple Quaker grave.

daily travails, risks, tactics and daunting obstacles which fugitives faced.

The River Jordan is captivating and, as with *Walk Through Darkness*, could, in our opinion, be brought forth as a major film.

When we interviewed Mr. Burke during his recent visit to *Free Press*, he explained that his book was sparked forty years ago by his coming across an original reward poster for Jane posted by Solomon Harness. Author Burke is a story in himself. Regarded as one of southeast Ohio's foremost Underground Railroad historians, Henry Burke descends from Underground Railroad freedom seekers, safe-house operators and conductors, and has done much to get official recognition and signage for a long list of Ohio Underground Railroad sites.

York's at Auburn, Tubman's home for 64 years after she attained her freedom in 1849.

Said Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley, the parks will be a "permanent tribute and gateway into the life of the Maryland-born American patriot whose courage, leadership, and legacy serve today as a model for us all."

The bills also authorize a new National Park Service grant program to research the life of Harriet Tubman and the African-American experience. Grants are intended mainly for researchers at historically African-American colleges and universities.

Funding for the parks and grant program is scheduled to be budgeted over several years beginning in September, 2009.