



Editorial

Give the South Credit

As a 1960s college freshmen, I attended Georgia Tech in Atlanta. My father, coming from a long line of fighters for racial equality and already having put his Air Force career on the line defying a general who told him to resegregate his squadron basketball team, told me in so many words, "You are in for a big surprise in the South, Yankee Boy." As an 18-year-old, I wasn't listening but found out soon enough that Dad was right.

I didn't believe it when I heard that an Atlanta restaurateur was selling ax handles for the sole purpose of attacking blacks, so off I went to the Pickrick Restaurant and saw for myself the rack of ax handles being sold at two dollars apiece at the front door. After I hightailed it back north to complete college, I was astonished when the restaurant's owner, Lester Maddox, in 1967 got himself elected governor of Georgia on *the strength of selling the ax handles*.

Fast forward to a few years ago when visiting our daughter in Little Rock, Arkansas, the site of Governor Orval Faubus's nation-shaming attempt to defy a desegregation order in 1957. I hadn't spent much time in the deep south since my brush with Maddox.

I wondered what to expect when we went out to dinner with our white daughter whose boyfriend was an African-American heart surgeon. The restaurant's multiracial staff and clientele including mixed couples that evening enjoyed an entirely relaxed atmosphere. This publisher saw that he had a few outdated notions to get rid of and some catching up to do on today's southern sociology.

While it is true that the South has more progress to make, so does most of the rest of the nation. While South Carolina still doesn't mind the offense of its state flag, it has sent to Congress an African-American who is now number three in the House hierarchy. Mississippi has more elected African-American officials than any
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Uncle Tom's Cabin Has First Tour, to Open Fully in 2012

The Josiah Henson Historic Site, the original Uncle Tom's Cabin, was opened to the public for the first time on November 7, celebrating Maryland Emancipation Day.

Since the cabin was purchased by the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission in January, 2006, it and the adjoining Riley farmhouse have been undergoing restoration. Montgomery County Parks anticipates opening the Bethesda, Maryland, site on a regular basis by 2012, with limited seasonal openings in the meantime. Check at MontgomeryParks.org for tour dates.

Henson escaped slavery from this farm in 1825 and travelled the Underground Railroad to Canada where he founded the town of Dawn and the first school for freedom seekers. Henson's 1849 autobiography put him on the lecture circuit in both countries and be-

came the basis for Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the definitive exposé of slavery which became the world's first international best-seller.



Surrounded by four-lane highways, high-rise apartments and urban sprawl, it is a miracle that the cabin and Riley home survived. The property's last owner, Hildegard Mallet-Prevost who died at 100 in 2006, cared well for the Henson cabin and made no secret of it but did not speak much about it either.

Ohio Underground Railroad Historian Henry Burke Honored

The Ohio Association of Historical Societies and Museums awarded Underground Railroad historian Henry Burke its 2009 Award of Individual Achievement at a ceremony at the Ohio Historical Society on October 3.

In honoring Burke, the Association cited his long work in identifying, publicizing and gaining official recognition for many Underground Railroad sites in southeastern Ohio where he lives and in nearby counties of West Virginia.

Henry Burke descends from several of the 500 slaves freed by Robert Carter III in 1791 from Leo Plantation in Virginia, the largest emancipation in the nation's history. One impetus Robert Carter had in emancipating his slaves was to free his own mixed-race half-brother Baptist Billy, Henry Burke's ancestor. The Burkes and others then migrated to freedom in the Ohio area where Burke lives.



Another ancestor, Burke's great-grandfather John Curtis, escaped on the Underground Railroad from Harrisonburg, Virginia, to Ohio.

Burke is the recipient of many other historical awards and received the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center's Outstanding Community Research Award in 2004. Henry Burke is shown here with President Barack Obama at an event in Nelson, Ohio.

Mob Influence At Hopper-Gibbons House?

One reason why preservationists have had such difficulty in stopping illegal modifications to the Hopper-Gibbons Underground Railroad safe-house in New York City might be mob influence at the City's Buildings Department.

The *New York Times* reports that last month Manhattan prosecutors accused the Luchese crime family of infiltrating the Buildings Department, landing jobs as building inspectors and committing a wide range of crimes. Six building inspectors have been accused of taking bribes to grant building permits, expedite inspections and overlook building violations.

Manhattan district attorney Robert M. Morgenthau says that 27 people recently indicted have been arrested in connection with the Buildings Department investigation.

Preservationists Fern Luskin and Julie Finch were awarded the 2009 Free Press Prize for Preservation for exposing the illegal work on Hopper-Gibbons House and, after repeatedly being rebuffed, getting the Buildings Department to halt work at the site. Luskin and Finch live in homes a few doors away from Hopper-Gibbons House and have spearheaded the effort to have the entire block
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state. In July, we reported here that the Harriet Tubman African-American Museum received a \$25,000 grant from the City of Macon, Georgia, right in Lester Maddox's backyard.

So, let us all give the South credit for coming further on race than any region over the last generation or so, a fact and source of national pride.

For 18 years, I lived in the nation's most racially diverse city and perhaps best example of racial harmony. It certainly felt that way. Any place would do well to follow Sacramento, California's contented example.

Peter H. Michael

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Review: Freedom's Struggle: A Response to Slavery from the Ohio Borderlands

By Tom Calarco

Writer Tom Calarco, author of several Underground Railroad books, was winner of the 2008 Free Press Prize for Advancement of Knowledge of the Underground Railroad.

Another excellent regional history was added to the growing list of books that are increasing our Underground Railroad knowledge.

Freedom's Struggle by Gary Knepp tells the story of the Underground Railroad in Clermont County, Ohio, east of Cincinnati with 21 miles of Ohio riverfront facing Kentucky. As Knepp explains, the dynamics of being on the borderline between slavery and freedom were made even more combustible because the county was settled by former southerners who hated slavery.

Featured Underground Railroad Site: Odessa, Delaware

One of an occasional series on Underground Railroad sites in the United States and Canada

A community doesn't have to be big to have a distinguished Underground Railroad presence. Odessa, Delaware, population under 300, lies on a major Underground Railroad route used by Harriet Tubman among others. Odessa is situated 70 miles north of Tubman country around Bucktown, Maryland, and 18 miles south of the home of safe-house operators Thomas Garrett and his family in Wilmington, Delaware.

Among the many historic buildings of the 18th-century town are the Appoquinimink Friends Meeting House built in 1785 and, less than a mile away, Corbit-Sharp House, both verified Underground Railroad safe-houses.

William Still revealed in his 1872 *The Underground Railroad* that Daniel Corbit assisted freedom seekers. Harriet Tubman is known to have been sheltered in Odessa. Corbit was

Not only does Knepp conjure vivid pictures of the people and events, but he does it in clear and well organized prose giving the reader a deeper understanding of the Underground Railroad and what precipitated it.

Knepp sets the stage by introducing the issues and movements that propelled the development of the Underground Railroad. After tracing the origin of New World slavery, he demonstrates the effect of the evangelism on the antislavery movement, tracing its influence on John Rankin, who lived in neighboring Brown County. Knepp gives an excellent account of the story of Rankin's influential *Letters to Slavery*, quoting at length from some. He reviews the history of the American *Please go to Review on page 3, column 1*

noted in a letter written by Ezekiel Jenkins and carried by conductor Samuel D. Burris when escorting Samuel and Emeline Hawkins and their family from Camden to Odessa.



Odessa's Corbit-Sharp House

Historic Odessa Foundation conducts Underground Railroad children's programs by candlelight in the Corbit-Sharp House's muskrat skinning shed. Visit historicodessa.org or view the film *Whispers of Angels* for more.

US Department of Education Underground Railroad Program

The United States Department of Education operates a little-publicized Underground Railroad education grant program of which many private Underground Railroad organizations might not be aware.

According to the Department's Underground Railroad Educational and Cultural Program's website, the program "provides grants to support research, display, interpretation, and collection of artifacts related to the history of the Underground Railroad".

With stiff requirements that recipients have substantial private support, create an endowment providing for operations, and establish a network of satellite centers throughout the United States, the program is clearly tai-

lored to larger organizations. The largest and most frequent grant recipients since the program's founding in 2002 have been Cincinnati's National Underground Railroad Freedom Center and the Historical Society of New York which are also the only two 2008 grant recipients. Funding for 2009 is \$1,945,000.

For more information and applications, visit ed.gov/programs/ugroundrr/index.html.

The federal government's two other Underground Railroad programs are the National Park Service's Network to Freedom operation and the Smithsonian Institution's Underground Railroad program of the National Museum of African-American Culture and History set to open on the National Mall in 2015.

Review

Colonization Society revealing its racist motive, followed by discussions of the American Antislavery Society and the Liberty Party, showing how many early leaders in antislavery had been converts from the Colonization movement. He concludes this introduction to the Underground Railroad with a discussion of the Fugitive Slave Laws and three important related regional cases: two involving fugitive slaves, Eliza Jane Johnson and Margaret Garner, and the third involving Brown County conductor John Mahan.

Knepp illuminates the towns of New Richmond, Moscow, Felicity, Bethel and Williamsburg, all active in the Underground Railroad. He notes that, despite significant numbers of free blacks, there was little extant history of black participation because fugitive slaves passed through quickly and left little evidence, most fugitive slaves were illiterate, blacks left few written records, the illegal nature of Underground Railroad made record keeping unlikely, and blacks generally kept their history alive with oral tradition passed down through their families.

The county was touched by some of the most important individuals in the anti-slavery movement: John Rankin had many ties there; James Birney started his abolitionist newspaper, *The Philanthropist*, there; Senator Thomas Morris, the first abolitionist U.S. Senator came from the county; and noted Wesleyan-Methodist preacher and Underground Railroad conductor Luther Lee was a pastor there.

Among the colorful and dedicated Underground Railroad operatives was Charles "Boss" Huber, who would stand on a soapbox in the middle of his hometown of Williamsburg and make booming condemnations of slavery. It is believed that Huber aided as many as 500 fugitive slaves.

Author Knepp also details incredible stories about fugitive slaves like one involving Jim and his friend, Joe, from Louisville. Jim's master was very lenient which allowed Jim to get a crate and box up Joe like Henry "Box" Brown had been, and accompany Joe in the box aboard a steamboat to New Richmond, near where Jim's free parents lived. Joe remained in the box for 36 hours before reaching New Richmond, nine hours longer than Brown took, and survived. Joe was then sent by New Richmond

Sign Up: Lynx Underground Railroad Registry Nears 100

Even before *Underground Railroad Free Press* was launched more than three years ago, the suggestion that there needed to be a central registry of contemporary Underground Railroad organizations was often heard in the international Underground Railroad community.

Groups wanted a "go to" place to get familiar with each other, communicate, and learn who and what were involved in Underground Railroad work today. It was apparent that lack of a nexus of Underground Railroad organizations was holding back progress for the entire community. In 2006, after hearing from several

well-informed Underground Railroad figures, *Free Press* decided to fill this vacuum with a new free central registry of Underground Railroad groups. We called it Lynx, a word-play evoking linking, quickness and centrality.

Lynx is the community's largest listing and the only one with contact information allowing immediate communication among groups. Headed toward 100 organizations in early 2010, Lynx continues to add groups in the United States and Canada. See page two here or visit the *Free Press* website and register your group today. And welcome aboard!

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agents to Levi Coffin in Cincinnati who put him on the Underground Railroad to Sandusky, Ohio, where he took a boat to Canada. A few months later, Jim and his wife joined Joe.

Superbly researched, the book uses a wide variety of sources, many from the nineteenth century, including the abolitionist newspaper of the Wesleyan-Methodist Church, *True Wesleyan*, as well as other sources of the era. Knepp also uses many primary source letters of the 1890s from the collection of Wilbur Siebert, the Ohio State University professor often regarded as the best early researcher of the Underground Railroad.

For true students of the Underground Railroad, this is a book to add to your collection. *Freedom's Struggle* is published by Little Miami Publishing Company.

Gary Knepp is an attorney who lives in Milford, Ohio. He has written four other books, his newest and most recently published, *Beyond the Names: The Stories of Clermont County, Ohio, Vietnam War Dead*.

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While we give free listings of organizations on Lynx and of events on Datebook at our website, you might need to go further in advertising your organization, upcoming festival or meeting, new book, music or products for sale.

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Indictment

of historic homes designated as a historic landmark.

At its October 13 meeting, New York City's Landmarks Preservation Commission unanimously conferred protection on a dozen neighboring buildings on West 29th Street including Hopper-Gibbons House by creating the Lamartine Place Historic District with a protected historic designation.

Said Commissioner Robert Tierney citing the "enormously important history" of the properties, "There's no question that, in my mind, since the first time that this was brought to our attention, there's an incredibly committed neighborhood group – residents and committed neighbors – who have helped really lead this fight. We live in New York City, and we sometimes don't see our history as well and as clearly as we should," he added. "I think this helps clarify that."

The last apparent remaining battle is to get the city to order the restoration of Hopper-Gibbons House to its historic state before illegal construction began.