



Editorial

Keep "Uncle Tom's Kitchen"

Our front-page article in this issue recounts the odd situation of the old cabin in Bethesda, Maryland, which had been purported to be the "original Uncle Tom's Cabin." Since its 2006 purchase, this has been regarded as the single most important Underground Railroad find.

What there is no disagreement about is that the farm where the cabin is located is indeed where prominent Underground Railroad figure Josiah Henson was enslaved for 35 years before his escape to Canada and fame. It was Henson upon whom Harriet Beecher Stowe modeled the eponymous title figure of her 1852 blockbuster, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, still ranked as the most influential book ever authored by an American.

When at the peak of the housing bubble in 2006 the local park commission purchased the Riley Farm where the cabin sits, it paid top price on the belief that the cabin was the actual spot where Henson lived. However, it seems that some at the time of the purchase were telling the Commission and the county government which authorized the purchase that in fact the cabin was the farmhouse's kitchen and that Henson would have resided in slave quarters now long gone. There was plenty of blame to go around when this warning resurfaced last month.

So, if there is no Uncle Tom's Cabin after all, what to do?

Some now feel that the property has insignificant historical value and should be sold to help the cash-strapped county. Others say that Henson's proven association with the property is more than
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Dalai Lama Receives Freedom Center Award



His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, the Tibetan head of state and spiritual leader of the Tibetan Buddhist Church, was awarded the International Freedom Conductor Award by the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center on October 20.

Said Freedom Center CEO Donald Murphy, "We are tremendously honored and gratified that His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, will accept our Freedom Conductor Award, which goes to individuals and organizations that have been conspicuous and effective champions of freedom. The Dalai Lama's tireless efforts on behalf of Tibet - and his life-long advocacy of freedom and peace for all people - are in the finest traditions of those abolitionists who fought for the eradication of slavery in the 18th and 19th Centuries."

In 1959, the Dalai Lama fled Tibet in the face of persecution by China and has been living in Dharamsala, India, the seat of the Tibetan political administration in exile. He was the recipient of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize.

Past Freedom Conductor Award recipients include civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks, South African Bishop Desmond Tutu and former Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton for their work fundraising for Hurricane Katrina and Indian Ocean tsunami survivors.

Doubt Over Building Thought to Be Uncle Tom's Cabin

It was the all-time Underground Railroad archaeological find but now it is in doubt.

In 2006 when the owner of the property died, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission bought the old Bethesda, Maryland, farmhouse with its adjoining cabin thought to have been where Josiah Henson had been enslaved. Now, it appears that the cabin was merely a kitchen and that Henson actually lived in the farm's slave quarters no longer standing.

Officials now question the million-dollar purchase of the property, especially since apparently there was discussion at the time that the cabin was not the one after which Harriet Beecher Stowe's book took its name. The Commission is debating how now to in-

terpret the property to the public and even whether to keep or sell it. Shown here is the debated cabin now thought to be a kitchen.



However, many officials and historians agree that the property's proven association to Henson is uniquely important in its own right. See the *Free Press* editorial in this issue for opinion on this coming decision.

Archeological Digs Reveal Black Life in 1800s and Earlier

Timbuctoo, New Jersey. Blackdom, New Mexico. New Philadelphia, Illinois. Hall Town, Maryland. The extensive rediscovered African burial ground in New York City.

New archaeological work on lost African-American communities led mainly by black academicians, politicians and museum staff is busy digging out the past. Says Rex Ellis of the Smithsonian Institution, "The tradition has been to overlook these things in the past. For us, this activity will contribute appreciably to our understanding of African Americans

as builders and contributors to this nation."

Timbuctoo went from 37 buildings in the 1860 census to one church ten years ago to nothing today. Local descendants say that better economic opportunities elsewhere gradually drained the village which had been an Underground Railroad stop. Some sites such as Hall Town were maroon communities founded in hard-to-access locations.

For more on digs around the country, search on Timbuctoo at washingtonpost.com.

enough to warrant keeping the property even if the county can no longer claim to have rescued "Uncle Tom's Cabin." According to a long October 3 article in *The Washington Post*, the latter opinion seems to be carrying the day.

Free Press supports this view and urges the Board of County Commissioners of Montgomery County to keep and promote this nationally important historic site.

In our next issue, we will reveal another Maryland farm where Henson lived and his probable blood relation to a president.

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New Gettysburg Underground Railroad Tour

As Debra McCauslin puts it, "Thousands visit Gettysburg every year to learn about the effects and aftermath of the Civil War. On your next visit, take some time to learn about a cause of the war."

McCauslin's cause, of course, is the Underground Railroad. She operates the Quaker Valley Underground Railroad Tour featuring visits to, among other places, two verified Underground Railroad sites, the Yellow Hill Cemetery where a pre-Civil War African American community existed, and the Menallen Friends Meetinghouse and cemetery where Quakers still meet for worship today.

The tour concludes with a slide presentation telling stories of a number of local Underground Railroad figures including Kitty Payne and her three children who were kidnapped in 1845 after having been freed from slavery.

The tour locale sits amidst a dense network of Underground Railroad routes and safe-houses extending up from Frederick County, Maryland, and branching off to the famous sites of Columbia and Christiana, Pennsylvania.

Tours are by appointment. Visit freedomlies-north.org to schedule or for more information.

National Geographic Films Abby Hopper Gibbons Documentary

On November 9, National Geographic began shooting a documentary film on the life of Abby Hopper Gibbons, a New York City abolitionist and Underground Railroad operator.

Fern Luskin, who lives near the Manhattan home where Gibbons grew up, says that the film will concentrate on the New York draft riots of 1863 in which what is now known as Hopper-Gibbons House was sacked, and on northern women's roles in the Civil War.

One segment of the film will tell the story of the connection between Gibbons and her direct living descendant, Angela Shear, who owns one of Gibbons' diaries. Shear travelled to New York City for the filming which is tak-

Network to Freedom Group Dissolves Mysteriously

Friends of the Network to Freedom Association, a private nonprofit organization founded as a fundraising arm of the National Park Service's Network to Freedom Underground Railroad program, has ceased operations.

Founded in 2007, the group held national conferences that year and in 2008, and was listed in 2009 as cosponsor of the Network to Freedom's annual conference. Donna Stokes-Lucas, the group's vice president, states that the organization disbanded in 2009 some time after she resigned from its board that January.

Alystine Turley, the group's last president, told *Free Press*, "I have few comments to offer regarding the Friends Association or its future direction, other than the fact there was a

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ing place on location on 29th Street in Manhattan where Hopper-Gibbons House and Luskin's homes are located.

In Underground Railroad days and at the time of the draft riots, Hopper-Gibbons House was owned by Gibbons' father, Isaac Hopper, an ardent abolitionist. Because of the home's Underground Railroad roles, the City Council of New York designated the Lamartine Place neighborhood as a historical landmark earlier in 2010. Disputes continue between neighbors and owners of Hopper-Gibbons House who continue attempting illegal alterations.

See the March, 2010, issue of *Free Press* at the *Free Press* website archives for more.

feeling new leadership was needed. I still believe a national friends association is much needed, though it seems a difficult task to accomplish."

Friends of the Network to Freedom Association is a tax-exempt non-profit corporation which, as of *Free Press*'s last interview with its principals, had not been legally dissolved. No one interviewed stated any knowledge of the status of the organization's assets.

Diane Miller, national program manager of the Network to Freedom, says she is not aware of any plans to revive Friends of the Network to Freedom Association and has not been contacted by any entity which has identified itself as a successor to the group.