



# UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad community

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## Bipartisan Effort in Congress to Keep Plan Putting Tubman on the \$20 Bill Seeks to Thwart Trump/Mnuchin Scheme to Keep Her Off

By Eugene L. Meyer

This article originally appeared in the October 27, 2017, issue of *The Washington Post*. Reprinted with permission. Eugene L. Meyer is the author of the forthcoming *Five for Freedom: The African American Soldiers in John Brown's Army*. See [eugenelmeyer.com/](http://eugenelmeyer.com/) for more.

Harriet Tubman would not believe what Dorchester County is doing in her name, but she might not be surprised by President Trump's casual dismissal of his predecessor's decision to put her on the front of a new \$20 bill, replacing Andrew Jackson, long revered as the people's president but a slaveholder who also sought to banish indigenous Americans.

Tubman, born into slavery as Araminta Ross in this sparsely settled county of woods, farms and marsh on Maryland's Eastern Shore, fled to freedom in 1849, then returned again and again to lead 70 family members and friends out of bondage. Abolitionist John Brown called her the "general" for her fearless role, and anti-slavery activist William Lloyd Garrison nicknamed her "Moses."

Her life and legacy are celebrated in Church Creek at the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Historical Park, a joint federal-state ef-

fort. Open since only March, its museum features an enlarged picture of the \$20 bill with her silhouette in the center and the words "Coming Soon." The caption calls the banknote "the most popular currency in the world" and promises its release in 2020, on the centennial of the 19th Amendment that gave women the vote.

But Trump seems determined to erase all vestiges of the Obama legacy. During the campaign, he declared his opposition to changing the currency; he suggested she appear instead on the rarely used \$2 bill. In August, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, when asked, was noncommittal, suggesting that no change is needed.

That would certainly disappoint many in Dorchester County, which aggressively promotes itself as the "Birthplace of Harriet Tubman, American Hero." The irony is striking: During the 1960s, the county seat of Cambridge saw racial fire and fury and the longest federal occupation by the National Guard in that tumultuous decade.

South of the Choptank River, traditionally the dividing line between the shore's somewhat more progressive and more conservative banks, Dorchester has come a long way.

When I visited in the late 1970s, Afri-  
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## Baltimore to Observe Frederick Douglass's 200<sup>th</sup> Birthday This Friday

In a series of events leading up to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary on February 18, 2018, of his birth, the city of Baltimore will celebrate the life and accomplishments of Frederick Douglass who twice lived there.

The first of these events on **November 18** and is a walking tour of Douglass sites in the Fells Point neighborhood sponsored by Baltimore Black Heritage Tours (BBH) and led by BBH president Louis Fields. The sites include the docks where the young enslaved Douglass worked, his escape site, the row of five townhouses that he owned later, and the local environment where he spent two eras of his life, first as a slave, than free.

*See Louis Fields' Free Press interview on page 3.*

The tour will begin at 10:00 AM at Broadway and Thames Street, and end at the nearby Douglass-Myers Museum at 1429 Thames Street where Douglass re-enactor Nathan Richardson — artist, poet, historian and interpreter — will entertain with a "Discussion With Frederick Douglass" featuring Douglass's historic speech at Bethel AME Church on November 17, 1864.

For tickets or more information, contact [loucfields@gmail.com](mailto:loucfields@gmail.com) or 443-983-7974.

# Underground Railroad Sites Far Off the Beaten Track: Northernmost US Safehouse, Deep In the Appalachians, Along the Jersey Coast

## A Mile From Canada

As interest in ancestry and in the Underground Railroad has risen, people are discovering more often these days that they had a relative who was involved in the Underground Railroad either as a freedom seeker or someone who aided them.

Sacramento, California, attorney Chris Whelan's curiosity about his genealogy led him to a number of discoveries of his ancestors' movements back and forth across the American-Canadian border during the Revolutionary War, and how a

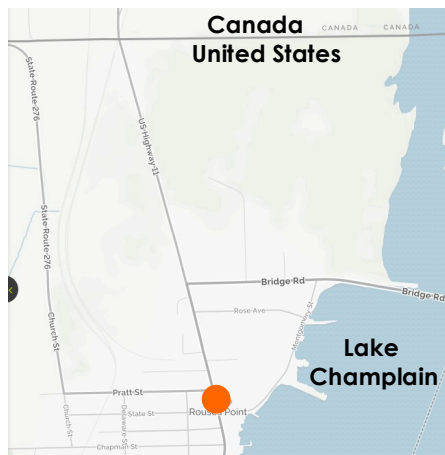
branch of the family ended up settling in upstate New York at the village of Rouse's Point only a mile from Canada. Digging deeper, Whelan learned that a later generation operated what, if not the northernmost Underground Railroad safehouse, then, did so within a tight cluster of safehouses that certainly were.

While part of Maine and the Lake of the Woods extension of Minnesota are farther north than Rouse's Point, there are no known safehouses in either area.

Award-winning Underground Railroad author Tom Calarco writes that Lake

Champlain's Rouse's Point's pier on Lake Champlain was a key station on the Champlain Line of the Underground Railroad running from Albany and Troy, New York, to Canada's Richelieu River. Only a mile from the international border, the bustling 100-foot dock and train depot were end points for Lake Champlain steamboats and for trains from New York City and Boston. Freedom seekers could continue north on trains to Canada. Rouse's Point's pier became a major transfer station where fugitives from slavery boarded trains for their final destinations.

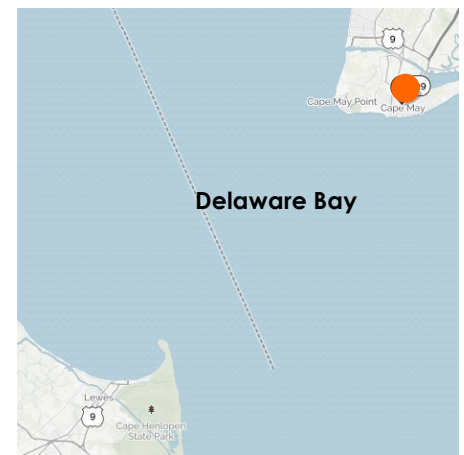
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Rouse's Point, New York



Cumberland, Maryland



Cape May, New Jersey

## An Entire National Park Was an Escape Route

With its shoestring shape seldom more than a few hundred yards across, the Chesapeake and Ohio National Historical Park runs 185 miles from the Georgetown neighborhood of Washington, DC, to Cumberland, Maryland, hugging the banks of the Potomac River. From 1826 until 1924, barges pulled by mules treading the adjacent towpath plied the canal, bringing coal, lumber and grain downstream to Washington, returning with manufactured or bulk goods for the countryside.

The convenient towpath also saw plenty of foot and horseback travellers, and one of the heaviest volumes of Underground Railroad traffic anywhere. Running more or less east-west, the canal was regularly crossed in a matter of minutes by freedom seekers heading north. Coming north overland through Virginia, they had to cross the Potomac and, above

Washington, the canal and its towpath.

In his autobiography, freedom seeker Charles Bentley writes that he crossed the Potomac River at Point of Rocks in 1841 and "went up alongside Catoctin Mountain."

The African-American Joseph Blanhum owned and operated a ferry crossing the Potomac River just downstream from Harper's Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia). Reaching the Maryland side of Mr. Blanhum's ferry run, passengers would directly cross the canal. In 1844, Blanhum was caught ferrying freedom seekers, tried, convicted, and sentenced to three years in prison, which he served before resuming his ferry business.

But some used the canal towpath itself as their escape route.

In his autobiography, freedom seeker

James Curry of Person County, North Carolina, wrote of his using the Canal's towpath in 1833 on his flight to freedom. Crossing the Potomac at Georgetown, Curry walked the towpath for 100 miles to Williamsport, Maryland, where he turned north for Pennsylvania. Curry recounts his crossing of the Potomac River into Washington, DC, and then taking "the Montgomery Road . . . [and] the towpath of the Canal . . . [to] Williamsport and Hagerstown." Given his route, Mr. Curry very possibly met Basil Newman, the Underground Railroad conductor and ferry operator at White's Ferry, which is located directly along the canal near Dickerson, Maryland.

Records of Cumberland's Emanuel Episcopal Church tell of freedom seekers arriving at the church from the canal tow-

*Please see Park Route, page 5, column 3*

## An Interview With Underground Railroad Entrepreneur Louis Fields

Earlier this month, Underground Railroad Free Press interviewed Louis Fields, founder of the Maryland Underground Railroad Coalition, Baltimore Black Heritage Tours, and Harriet Tubman Day in Maryland, and impresario of countless events and observations celebrating African Americana and the Underground Railroad. Fields won the 2015 Underground Railroad Free Press Prize for Leadership in the International Underground Railroad Community.

**Free Press** Louis Fields, as we come up on the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Frederick Douglass, what is it that Americans should most remember about Douglass?

**Louis Fields** The life and legacy of Frederick Douglass provide America with many examples of the true meaning of being an American. As an American slave, being denied his rights as a human being, held in bondage and enslaved for nearly two decades, Frederick Douglass gained his freedom, led the efforts to free his enslaved people, and dedicated his life to ending slavery, prejudice and all forms of discrimination.

**FP** After attaining his freedom, what kinds of impacts did Frederick Douglass have on national thought and the course of American history?

**LF** As an Underground Railroad station-master, orator, world traveler, writer, publisher, statesman and advocate, Douglass' impact would be felt for nearly six decades after obtaining his freedom. His speeches on the US Constitution, slavery and 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and his three autobiographies, hundreds of articles and letters, advising US Presidents, and newspaper gave the American public a sense of life and perspective from a person who had been a slave, who just happened to be an American of African descent. Douglass became the leading spokesman for abolition of slavery, recruitment of Colored Troops in the Civil War, and voting rights for black men and women, and used his fame to address other social issues, especially inequality.

**FP** How did you come upon the idea of honoring Frederick Douglass on his 200<sup>th</sup> birthday?

**LF** In year 2000, I created the Frederick Douglass Path to Freedom Walking Tour in historic Fell's Point. Although he was born down on Maryland's Eastern Shore in February of 1818, Douglass lived in Fell's Point from 1826 to 1838. Because of his life's achievements, he deserves a bicentennial birthday celebration. My role as President of the Baltimore African American Tourism Council has often been ensuring that the history, achievements and contributions of Blacks in Maryland are not overlooked, omitted or under-valued.

**FP** Douglass is one of America's most important historical figures. How is it that there isn't more national recognition of this milestone anniversary? Or is there?

**LF** Yes, there is a considerable amount of national, regional and local efforts to commemorate the bicentennial of the Douglass birth. Efforts are underway in several states and Washington, DC.

**FP** On this occasion, what is the federal government doing to recognize Frederick Douglass and the nation-changing impact that he had?

**LF** US Senators Ben Cardin and Chris Van Hollen have introduced S1582 to establish the Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Commission to plan, develop, recommend to Congress and carry out programs and activities that are fitting and proper to celebrate that anniversary in a manner that appropriately honors Frederick Douglass. (Congressman Andy Harris and Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton introduced companion HR 2989).

**FP** How was it that the young enslaved Frederick Douglass made his way from Maryland's Eastern Shore where he was born to the docks of Baltimore?

**LF** It is my belief that his father/master Thomas Auld sent Douglass to Baltimore to remove Douglass from his sights and environment where Mrs. Thomas Auld would be present. Mrs. Auld was Lucretia Anthony Auld, the daughter of overseer Anthony Auld.

**FP** Douglass lived in a number of places in the US and abroad, and spent his last years in Washington, DC, but lived twice

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in Baltimore. Tell us about the mark he made in the city now honoring him.

**LF** Frederick Douglass' love for and legacy in Baltimore are best found in his writings, especially in *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. The first high school for African Americans is named in honor of Frederick Douglass. The Douglass-Myers Maritime Park and Museum is named in his honor. Douglass is probably the only Marylander that has four statues in Maryland erected in his honor, one of which is at Morgan State University.

**FP** You are the impresario of the walking tour  
*Please see Fields, page 4, column 1*



## Fields

of Douglass sites in the Fells Point neighborhood and lecture at the Douglass-Myers Museum on November 18. Are tickets still available and, if so, how does one purchase them?

**LF** This event will be held on November 18, 2018, from 10 AM to 2 PM in Fell's Point. At ten, I will lead the Frederick Douglass Path to Freedom Walking Tour in Fell's Point. Immediately following the tour, "A Day with Frederick Douglass" will be held at the Douglass-Myers Museum. Information and tickets are available at [loucfields@gmail.com](mailto:loucfields@gmail.com).

**FP** Moving from Frederick Douglass to Louis Fields, you have long been involved in African-Americana with tours, recognitions and Maryland's Underground Railroad, and were honored with the Underground Railroad Free Press Prize for Leadership in 2015. What got you started in this involvement and when?

**LF** I started as a volunteer in 1993 and saw that African American history and its many aspects were being left out of Baltimore tourism marketing and promotion.

**FP** What should federal, state and local governments be doing to better illuminate the importance of national history as you are doing?

**LF** Government entities, although they are doing more now than ever before, should continue to allocate increased resources, funding and focus awareness on the importance of sharing and saving local history as a vital part of tourism.

**FP** High school and college American history text books are often criticized for giving a sanitized version of history, glossing over national faults and mistakes that don't fit an idealistic, predominantly white narrative that predominantly white school boards are likely to continue with. What corrects the narrative?

**LF** Encouraging students, teachers and educators to read more books written and published by African Americans that cover the entire span of American history, albeit from an African American perspective.

**FP** Any last words of advice for *Free Press* readers?

**LF** Thanks to the efforts of writers like Frederick Douglass and *Free Press*, readers have vast and varied choices of non-fiction literature. Thank you.

## \$20 Bill

can Americans were living in chicken coop houses and Cambridge was rigidly segregated — the town closed its public pool rather than integrate, and the black population was unrepresented on the county council, despite comprising 30 percent of the population. At-large voting was to blame.

It took legal action and the Justice Department to change that — under the 1965 voting rights law the Supreme Court largely eviscerated in 2013. Complying with a consent decree in 1985, the county replaced at-large with district voting, resulting in the election of the first black county council member. A separate suit led to a second black-majority district in the city. Today, 47 percent of Cambridge's population is African American, two of Cambridge's five city commissioners are black, and the city has its first black mayor, who is in her third term.

To be sure, high unemployment, poverty and other ills still disproportionately affect the black community. However, "Things have changed considerably," said William Jarmon, an African American Cambridge native who left to teach school in suburban Washington and returned here in retirement. "Politically, there's representation at every level."

Jarmon, 74, is active in the Harriet Tubman Organization, established to perpetuate her legacy. Its members worked on the Church Creek project and welcome visitors from all over the country to the Harriet Tubman Museum and Educational Center, its small museum in downtown Cambridge. And now the county itself is seeking to capitalize on her roots. But there remains uncertainty over whether the honor will extend, as intended, to U.S. currency.

Two years ago, U.S. Reps. Elijah E. Cummings (D-Md.) and John Katko (R-N.Y.), who represents the Upstate district where Tubman lived after the Civil War until her death, introduced legislation to put her on the currency, not specifying which one.

When, in 2016, Treasury Secretary Jack Lew said she would appear on the \$20 bill in 2020, they chose not to pursue it. But with the Trump administration noncommittal or negative, they reintroduced the bill in September, this time specifying the denomination and year of its release.

Dorchester citizens are already circulating

petitions to support the effort. "I'm sure there will be no difficulty getting signatures," Jarmon told me.

"I think if she came back and went into a rural area, she would say very little has changed except for roads to get there," he said. "I think if she came back today to Cambridge, she could truly say there is no evidence of slavery as she knew it, but she might find some of the African Americans living under the same conditions." She might also discover the 125-mile Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway, with 36 historic sites charted on a driving-tour map she could pick up at the county visitor center in Cambridge.

The face on the \$20 bill is more than just small change.

## Three Sites

Says Whelan, "My Canadian ancestors who fought on the side of the colonies in the Revolutionary War had previously fought England in 1759 when it conquered the French in the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, so called because it was fought on land originally owned by my twelfth great-grandfather Abraham Martin. These ancestors, upset about that defeat, gladly joined the Colonies in 1776 to fight the British again. However, by doing so they were exiled from Canada, losing all that they had there.

"After the war they were refugees and, after red tape, delay and land swindles, were given land on Lake Champlain for their war service. Veteran great-great grandfathers Lt. Pierre Boileau, Sargent Louis Marney and Laurent Bruno Trombley received land in the Rouse's Point area. Laurent Bruno Trombley's son, Bruno Trombley, has been identified an Underground Railroad safe-house operator."

## Deep In the Mountains

Not all freedom seekers traversed Maryland on its western plains or Eastern Shore routes. Though the going was more difficult, some freedom seekers made their way north to the free state of Pennsylvania through the mountains of the Appalachian Range in distant reaches of western Maryland.

The farther west one goes in Maryland, the higher and more rugged the terrain becomes as the world's second oldest

*Please see Three Sites, page 5, column 1*

### Three Sites

mountain range rises to the eastern continental divide. The known safehouse furthest into the state's mountains is Emmanuel Episcopal Church in Cumberland.

In the early 1850s, escaped slave Samuel Denson arrived in Cumberland having gotten all the way from Mississippi. Though Cumberland was in slave territory by virtue of being in Maryland, Denson stayed, pretending to be a freedman, to work for the freedom of others.

Denson did his Underground Railroad work with Rev. David Buel, Rector of Emmanuel Parish, who had been active at Underground Railroad sites in Sykesville and Westminster, Maryland, before coming to Emmanuel in 1847. Rev. Buel hired Denson as Sexton of the Church. Denson's job included maintaining the church and rectory, stoking the furnace and ringing the church bell.

The church, rectory and parish are on a line with each other that runs about 200 yards connected by a tunnel that was part of the defenses of the former Fort Cumberland, which existed until 1814. It was a natural part of Samuel Denson's job to pass among these buildings day and night.

Another part of the old fort's defense works ran from under the east end of the church down the hill to the banks of Will's Creek, an area where rail lines came together at the terminus of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal and that was a natural hiding place for someone on the run. The Canal towpath was a major line on the Underground Railroad, connecting with a route that ran up the Valley of Virginia to Harpers Ferry.

Escaping slaves who reached Cumberland were instructed to hide and await a signal for their next move. It was Samuel Denson's job to send them a message by ringing the church bell in a special coded way and then bring them up the hill by the old fort's earthworks through an iron gate that led through a passage to safety under the church.

It was beneath the church that they would rest, receiving food and aid from Denson, Rev. Buel and others. When night fell, they would go down the tunnel through the basement of a nearby school into the basement of the rectory and out the rectory cellar door into an unpopulated

part of town. There they met up with transportation that would take them via one route or another across the Mason Dixon Line, just four miles away, into the free state of Pennsylvania. For many, the tunnels under Emmanuel Parish Church in Cumberland were their last stop in slave territory.

The tunnel network still exists. For more information or tours, visit [emmanuel-parishofmd.org/?page\\_id=17](http://emmanuel-parishofmd.org/?page_id=17).

### On the Atlantic

As unusual as a border site is, so are Underground Railroad safehouses or routes directly on the Atlantic coast. Cape May, New Jersey, has them.

East of the Appalachians, much Underground Railroad traffic was funneled through a relatively friendlier, easier-to-travel 50-mile swath up western Maryland's plains between Washington, DC, and the Appalachian foothills, and a lesser amount up Maryland's less populated Eastern Shore—Harriet Tubman country. Most Eastern Shore traffic channeled through Wilmington, Delaware, and then went on through Philadelphia.

But not all.

Some freedom seekers made their way to the southern Delaware town of Lewes where they would go by boat across the narrows of Delaware Bay to Cape May at the southernmost tip of New Jersey. Freedom seekers stepping off the boat at Cape May were first touching free soil. Several Underground Railroad sites and conductors have been identified in the town of Cape May.

Earlier this year, the National Park Service's Network to Freedom program recognized Cape May's Underground Railroad Trolley Tour, which is operated by the town's Community Arts Center.

The town was home to a community of free blacks, a number of whom aided freedom seekers on their way north. Called the wealthiest antebellum African American, Stephen Smith—lumber magnate, bank director and Underground Railroad leader—summered for decades in Cape May. The ex-slave risked everything to ferry people to freedom in his railroad cars. Harriet Tubman made her way to Cape May where she earned money for her freedom runs to and from the

Eastern Shore by working at the Congress Hall Hotel, which still exists and is on the tour, and at the Banneker Hotel. The tour also includes Mt. Zion Cemetery, where many Civil War veterans, black and white alike, are buried; and Owen Coachman House from which William Coachman, a relative, was kidnapped in the early part of the 19th century, sold south into slavery, and found and brought back to Cape May by abolitionist leader Isaac Hopper.

Said Center director David Mackenzie, "The tour builds on 20 years of looking into the history of the African American community in Cape May by members of Community Arts Center's history group. The tour rounds out its work, building an archive of African American history in Cape May that includes photos, oral histories and documents which are used for exhibits."

Regular tours are conducted from June through September, periodically during the spring and fall, and otherwise by appointment. For tour reservations call 609.884.5404.

### Park Route

path after crossing the Potomac at various points. (See the article above this one on page two.)

Not all freedom flights along the canal had good outcomes. The owners of Ferry Hill Plantation near Sharpsburg, Maryland wrote more than once of their capturing freedom seekers who were using the canal's towpath for their escapes.

Several accounts of captures along the canal by Ferry Hill owners are provided by the National Park Service, which owns Ferry Hill. Referring to the nineteenth century owners of Ferry Hill, the Park Service states that, "... the Blackfords captured runaways belonging to others. Blackford family journals document the capture of people fleeing along the Potomac River. John Blackford captured a woman on July 29, 1829, who belonged to a slave trader named Malone; she was committed to the Hagerstown jail with the intention of returning her to her master." The account goes on to reveal that, "Franklin Blackford found five runaways hiding near the canal on June 1, 1839."

How many succeeded and how many failed on this and other routes?