



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

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Three Regional Organizations Named as the 2019 Free Press Prize Winners



Preservation



Leadership



Knowledge

IN THIS ISSUE



The 2019 Free Press Prizes for leadership, preservation and advancement of knowledge are announced.



The Brethren used reasoning in deciding to aid freedom seekers in Iowa and support the equality of women.



Write us. Let us and, if you choose, *Free Press* readers know what is on your mind.

In a first, three organizations rather than individuals – an Underground Railroad nonprofit, a public parks commission, and a university library – are the winners of the 2019 Underground Railroad Free Press Prizes for preservation, leadership and advancement of knowledge, respectively. The prizes have been awarded by *Free Press* annually since 2008 to recognize the most outstanding contributions in the international Underground Railroad community in promoting Underground Railroad heritage, and are regarded as the community's top honors. This year's winners well exemplify the contributions that organizations can make.

The 2019 Free Press Prize for Preservation

This year's preservation prize is awarded to the **Underground Railroad Society of Cass County, Michigan** for restoration of four Underground Railroad safe-houses in and near Vandalia, Cass County, Michigan, and for setting a remarkable example of organizing, fundraising and management.

The Underground Railroad Society of Cass County was founded in 2009 to provide a focal point for exploration into the origins and activities of the local Underground Railroad, the unique role the people of Cass County and the surrounding area played throughout its existence, and how the Underground Railroad impacted local, state and national history. The organization began with no money, no property and no membership to speak of. Now, ten years later, the Society owns and is restoring three Underground Railroad sites. *Please see Preservation, page 2, column 1*

The 2018 Free Press Prize for Leadership

This year's leadership prize goes to the **Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission** for the rediscovery, purchase, restoration and making available to the public the childhood farm where Underground Railroad icon Josiah Henson lived in Bethesda, Maryland.

Josiah Henson, one of the most famous Underground Railroad freedom seekers whose life was in significant part the basis of Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 landmark *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, was born enslaved at Port Tobacco, Maryland, on the farm of Dr. Josiah Hanson McPherson, probably in 1795 or 1796.

In 1805, Josiah Henson's mother was sold to Isaac Riley, a farmer in Montgomery County, Maryland. In the same auction, Josiah, then nine or ten years old, was sold to Adam Robb, a tavern keeper in *Please see Leadership, page 2, column 2*

The 2018 Free Press Hortense Simmons Memorial Prize for the Advancement of Knowledge

This prize is awarded to **California State University, Sacramento**, for its library's Underground Railroad Project, which has, improbably for a far western state, documented that there was an Underground Railroad where many would assume none ever existed.

The westernmost known Underground Railroad site is a cabin, still existing, near Lincoln, Nebraska. But wherever there was slavery, there were brave souls who fled it and those who provided aid on their flights. Though California was admitted to the Union as a free state, Southern slave holders brought slaves into the state where, in the state's early years, there were an estimated 200 to 300 enslaved blacks and more than that number of enslaved Native Americans. So, yes, *Please see Knowledge, page 2, column 3*

Brethren Faith Quietly Acted in Iowa Underground Railroad

By Steve Hanken

Steve Hanken of Monticello, Iowa, is a retired factory sheet metal worker who has researched the Iowa Underground Railroad for nearly 20 years, and helped to develop the Iowa Freedom Trail. He also organizes tours for German travelers to Iowa.

Religion played a very active role in Underground Railroad activities. Most ascribe activity to two groups, the Quakers and the Congregationalists. There is little question that both groups are well regarded for their actions, but what about other faiths? Were

their proclivities such that they would follow the law rather than their conscience when it came to the question of slavery?

I began looking into questions of support for the Underground Railroad about ten years ago, focusing on the lesser known religions that came onto the frontier. The first one I looked into was the Church of the Brethren who were everywhere in Iowa and had many interesting aspects and a great many secrets. Because there *Please see Iowa, page 3, column 1*

Preservation Prize

Railroad-related buildings, and is acquiring a fourth. Membership tops 400 and volunteers are abundant. The Society has raised and spent about \$750,000 on purchasing and restoring the James E. Bonine House and the Bonine Carriage House, the Victorian home of Underground Railroad stationmasters James E. and Sarah Bogue Bonine.

The organization operates a 19-site self-guided driving tour of Underground Railroad sites around Vandalia. Three annual Society events draw thousands from throughout the region. Visitors from all over the world tour the Bonine House, Carriage House and the Stephen Bogue House, another Underground Railroad site owned by the organization.

The Society's Bonine House Research Library tells the stories of Quakers, free blacks and other abolitionists who were part of the local Underground Railroad, the Kentucky Raid, Ramptown, the 102nd United States Colored Troops in the Civil War, and Calvin Township, a prosperous local black community in the middle of slave times. The library houses the research of six Cass County historians, as well as that of the Society itself. Much of the research is digitized and available on the Society's award-winning website at urscc.org.

Says the organization's Cathy LaPointe, "There was a sense of destiny about this project. We were naïve and jumped in with both feet, somehow knowing it would be OK. This is a story that wanted to be told. The Board of Directors has been together since 2011, and docents and volunteers are steadfast. Members support us every year with donations from \$25 to \$10,000, and we have received several grants. As with so many organizations in Cass County, the McLoughlin Family Foundation has been a strong supporter. It took a chance when we had little but a broken down Bonine House. Its first donation allowed us to put on the porches, and its current donation will allow us to complete the kitchen and pantry. We plan to finish restoring Bonine House this year, and the Carriage House in 2020."

LaPointe continues "This community took a stand against slavery. Quakers, free blacks and other abolitionists helped over 1500 freedom seekers on their journey to Canada between 1830 and 1860. They did what was right under very dan-

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Leadership Prize

Rockville near the Riley farm. After the boy fell ill, Josiah Henson was sold in either 1805 or 1806 by Robb to Riley and began living in the Riley household's slave cabin reunited with his mother.

In 2006, the Riley farmhouse where Josiah Henson had been enslaved was rediscovered. This, the actual site of Uncle Tom's Cabin, is now regarded by many as the single most spectacular rediscovery of the Underground Railroad. The farmhouse's attached cabin, which for a time was believed to be the actual place of enslavement of Josiah Henson and therefore "the original Uncle Tom's Cabin" is now thought to have been the home's kitchen.

The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission is a regional body comprising the parks and parks departments of Maryland's Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, which are contiguous Washington, DC. On January 15, 2006, the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission purchased the property where Henson had been enslaved, a singularly far-sighted move. Until the purchase, very few including Underground Railroad experts knew that the cabin still existed. The cabin's previous owner, Hildegard Mallet-Prevost, made no secret of the cabin's existence but did not widely discuss it either. Ms. Mallet-Prevost, who died in 2005 at the age of 100, had provided excellent care to the property. The site's home dates to the late 1700s. The property, now known as Josiah Henson Park, is located at 11420 Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda, Maryland. The park is currently closed for renovation and construction of a Josiah Henson museum, and is expected to reopen in 2020.

After escaping slavery on the Underground Railroad in 1829, Henson settled in Canada, founded the town of Dawn, Ontario, established the first school for Underground Railroad freedom seekers, and became one of history's most prominent and articulate advocates for emancipation and human rights. Josiah Henson died May 5, 1883, probably in his late eighties, deeply revered in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. In 1909 his great-grandnephew, Matthew Henson, who accompanied Admiral Robert Peary on his expedition to the North Pole, became the first person ever to set foot at the Pole as he scouted ahead of Peary and the exploration party.

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Knowledge Prize

there was bound to be a California Underground Railroad and there was.

Unlike eastern and Midwestern states where the Underground Railroad was active enough to be less forgotten, what little was remembered about California's Underground Railroad was almost entirely lost until researchers at California State University in Sacramento began over fifteen years ago collecting whatever they could find and ended up amassing more than they had dreamed existed on the state's Underground Railroad. This was an improbable venture which succeeded, continues to do so quite nicely, and fills what had been a far west void.

In 2003, a group interested in the African American history of California, and in what role a western version of the Underground Railroad might have played in, it met at the library of California State University, Sacramento (CSUS). Local photographer Joe Moore convened the group, which named itself the CSUS Underground Railroad Project. Moore and his wife, history professor Shirley Moore, experts in African American experiences in Gold Rush-era California, had previously founded the annual Juneteenth Celebration in nearby Folsom that commemorates black experiences during the California Gold Rush years.

CSUS offered to host the project and gave it a home in the university's library. As it developed, the project evolved well beyond the usual physical collection of shelved materials into mainly a digital compilation. Typically, users now click their way through digital holdings—letters, journals, photographs, documents, newspapers, ephemera and more—that tell the story of historical African American experiences in California and the state's little-known involvement in the Underground Railroad. The digital archive has grown to now holds a trove high-quality images of original source material carefully catalogued for use by scholars and the public. Since 2003, CSUS's one-of-a-kind archive has drawn visitors from around the world.

Said Terry Webb, library director and dean at the time, "The library hasn't jumped into a major digital collection like this before. It's an exciting prospect."

Recognition of the CSUS Underground Railroad Digital Archive of the project came not long after its founding. Early funding came from a \$132,435 grant from

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Preservation

gerous circumstances. Descendants of these families still live here, and children portray their own ancestors in our Wax Museum. We are thrilled to have fulfilled our mission of ten years ago, and look forward to many more years of celebrating the story and legacy of the Underground Railroad in Cass County, Michigan."

Underground Railroad Free Press extends kudos to the Underground Railroad Society of Cass County, Michigan, for its accomplishments in organizing, planning and execution in its outstanding performance in preserving multiple Underground Railroad sites in its area and showing the way on how it is done.

Iowa

are various branches of Brethren today, they don't always mix well with one another, so I began looking at Brethren settlers of Iowa and followed them back to the roots of their religion.

They were the first "new" American religion, a mixing of Mennonite and German Lutheranism. The group also subscribed to what was known as "The 2nd Great Awakening," a belief that Judgment Day was soon to happen, so it was imperative to try and save as many souls as possible. With that evolved Revivals Church buildings, records, and many other things of little concern. Their interpretation of how God would view slavery was one of the first things studied by the church Bishops

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Leadership

Within nine months of publication, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had sold 500,000 copies in the United States, an unprecedented number, and within two years sold another 500,000 abroad, becoming the first international best-seller. Heavily researched and documented by Stowe, the book was the definitive exposé of the horrors of American slavery and became one of the direct causes of the Civil War eight years after its publication. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been translated into sixty languages, is still regarded as the most influential book ever written by an American, and has never been out of print since its original publication in 1852.

It appears that Josiah Henson is related to John Hanson, the first United States president under the Articles of Confederation, who lived in Port Tobacco. President Hanson and Josias Hanson McPherson were cousins. Based on Josiah Henson's claims, Underground Railroad researcher Karolyn Frost concluded that McPherson was very likely Henson's father and thus related to President Hanson. In an ironic twist of history, the Riley Farm was owned by John Hanson's grandson, United States Senator Alexander Contee Hanson, Jr., sometime before 1819 when the Senator died. Riley's slaves were not included in the sale.

who came to a remarkably progressive conclusion. They decided that if man was made in the image of God, would God appreciate being a slave? Women were included since they too were made in the image of God; the decision made a huge difference in how women would be treated as well as former slaves.

As early as 1815, at the first general conference of the United Brethren Church published its thoughts on slavery. Part of the religion earlier, this was finally put into print. One of the bishops, William Hanby, had been held as an indentured servant by a cruel Pennsylvania master and escaped to Ohio where he joined the Brethren. He took a very active role in the church and understood slavery for what it was and how it had affected him. He is one of the few Brethren that are known to have led slaves to freedom.

By 1825 slavery was never to be tolerated in the Brethren Church and to hold or sell slaves meant ex-communication. The question remains, how is it we hear so little of Underground Railroad activity within the Brethren? The best guess is the fear of damnation by failing to do what was right. or doing right and then taking

Knowledge

the California State Library, and from the National Park Service's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program, the federal government's leading Underground Railroad program. *Underground Railroad Free Press* featured the program in an article at the time.

"Most people don't think of the Underground Railroad as operating in California," Joe Moore said. "But there were still a lot of slave issues in California—like bringing slaves into the state and how they were to be treated. There were ads in the Sacramento newspapers offering blacks for sale." Moore added that, where there were slaves, there were runaways, and people who helped them. Moore and five graduate students from the history and public history programs visited 80 sites around the state and in British Columbia (Vancouver became a prime destination for blacks from California) and put together a list of materials.

The project is unique as the library provides access to materials it does not have physical possession of, acting as gateway to the resources rather than as their physical curator. The project's impact has gone beyond its original concept and made CSUS a logical place for people to donate historical material about the African American experience in California.

prideful credit for it.

There are plenty of others who came to Iowa with similar feelings on slavery. New School Presbyterians, the Covenanters and the Seceders all had a disdain for slavery and were likely to be aiding and abetting Underground Railroad activity, but being very zealous to not say anything about it during or afterward. Sometimes the only way we know something happened was after someone was caught, but usually his or her religion is not part of that record. I have often seen people 30 and 40 years after an incident go to great lengths to tell an Underground Railroad story and not reveal so much as a last name. This is part of the secrecy they swore to and what makes finding so many of these conductors so rare, especially 160 to 190 years ago.

In the end, many Brethren were adopted into the United Methodist Church, which brings us up to today. The "United" part of the Methodist faith refers to these very Brethren who took such an active and very quiet role not only in the emancipation of slaves, but also in the rights of women, a lasting legacy to be very proud of.