



# Underground Railroad Free Press®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

urrfreepress.com

September, 2011  
Volume 6, Issue 32

## Harris, Princes, Regan-Dinius Named 2011 *Free Press* Prize Winners

### The Prizes

The *Underground Railroad Free Press* Prizes are awarded each September by *Underground Railroad Free Press* in the fields of leadership, preservation and advancement of knowledge in the contemporary international Underground Railroad community. Judging is conducted by an expertly qualified international panel of impartial judges from various disciplines. To submit a 2012 nomination, download a nomination form from the *Free Press* web site, complete it and email it to publisher@urrfreepress.com.

### The Free Press Prize Panel of Judges

Authors Karolyn Smardz Frost and Fergus Bordewich, journalists Lawrence Hall and Wayne Young, and Professor Judith Wellman comprise the Panel of Judges. Canadians Frost and Hall make the panel international.

### The 2011 Free Press Prize for Underground Railroad Preservation



Randolph J. Harris

For his steadfast work in successfully gaining protection of threatened Underground Railroad and abolitionist sites in Pennsylvania, often against entrenched opposition and long odds, the Free Press Prize Judges have awarded Randolph J. Harris the 2011 *Underground Railroad Free Press* Prize for Preservation.

As his nominator said, Randy Harris has worked for more than a decade to identify, protect, and preserve Underground Railroad sites in and around Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. In spite of a local political climate which sometimes disfavored preservation, Harris succeeded in achieving three remarkable triumphs relating to the Underground Railroad.

Harris was instrumental in saving the home of the great abolitionist leader and Underground Railroad figure Thaddeus Stevens. Through dogged persistence, Harris led the fight to save the Stevens home, which has now become a centerpiece of historic downtown Lancaster redevelopment. Harris also discovered conclusive evidence that Stevens was not only sympathetic to the Underground Railroad but also a participant in it.

*See Harris, page 4, column 1*

### The 2011 Hortense Simmons Prize for the Advancement of Knowledge



Shannon and Bryan Prince

For their career-long work revealing and promoting Canada's rich Underground Railroad history, husband and wife Bryan and Shannon Prince, both Underground Railroad descendants, are the winners of the 2011 Hortense Simmons Prize for the Advancement of Knowledge.

The Princes reside in Canada's Elgin Settlement and Buxton Mission, the historic colony settled by fugitive slaves who came to Canada on the Underground Railroad. The Princes and their four children continue to farm the area where their Underground Railroad ancestors settled several generations ago.

Bryan Prince has long served as a board member and as Historian, and Shannon Prince as Curator at the Buxton National

*See Prince, page 4, column 2*

In 2010, the Free Press Prize Panel of Judges renamed the annual Free Press Prize for the Advancement of Knowledge in honor of Hortense Simmons, their colleague who spent a giving career advancing knowledge as a multiple Fulbright Scholar and professor emerita of English literature and ethnic studies at California State University, Sacramento. Dr. Simmons died of Lou Gehrig's disease in November, 2010.

### The 2011 Free Press Prize for Leadership in the Underground Railroad Community



Jeannie Regan-Dinius

For spearheading the development over an eleven-year period of what is thought by many to be the most effective state-sponsored Underground Railroad program in the United States, Jeannie Regan-Dinius has been named the 2011 winner of the *Underground Railroad Free Press* Prize for Leadership.

Regan-Dinius heads Indiana Freedom Trails, the State of Indiana Underground Railroad program which she was charged with creating when hired by the state's Department of Natural Resources in 2000. Says the Department's Paul Diebold of Regan-Dinius, "With few exceptions, not only did she single-handedly establish Indiana Freedom Trails, but has maintained it, and kept it vital and active for over a decade. That in itself is a notable feat, but for many communities, her words have led to action." Indiana Freedom Trails is housed within the state Department of Natural Resources' Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology.

Early in her role, Regan-Dinius organized Indiana Freedom Trails by recruiting a state-wide board which established a parallel private program coordinating

*See Regan-Dinius, page 4, column 3*

### September in August

This issue which you would normally receive on September 15 is being released in late August so that *Free Press's* publisher and his family can take a well-deserved vacation in September. We will see all of you again with our next issue on November 15. Have a good and safe Labor Day weekend.

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Visit [urffreepress.com](http://urffreepress.com) to learn more about these top honors in the international Underground Railroad community and to download a nomination form.

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Independent Reporting On  
Today's Underground Railroad

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## African American Civil War Memorial Unveiled in Washington

In July, the African American Civil War Memorial and Museum opened its new permanent quarters at 1925 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, across from the African American Civil War Monument. The inaugural's keynote speakers were Representatives John Lewis (D-Ga.) and Eleanor Holmes Norton (D.-DC), and Washington Mayor Vincent Gray.

The memorial and museum were a long time in the making from 1992 when the African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation was founded, through 1998 when Colin Powell and Frank Smith broke ground, to the opening of the museum in 1999, to this year's opening of the permanent quarters.

The museum and memorial do much to illuminate the African American's until recently nearly forgotten roles in preserving the Union and securing the blessing of liberty for all Americans. In 2007 the museum published and engraved the names of all 209,145 United States Colored Troops on the African American Civil War Memorial shown here. Visit



[afoamcivilwar.org](http://afoamcivilwar.org) for more.

The United States Colored Troops were deactivated at the end of the Civil War and reconstituted by act of Congress as the Army's segregated 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment in 1866, followed later that year with another cavalry regiment and two infantry regiments. By 1877, the regiments had become known as the Buffalo Soldiers, which Cheyenne warriors called them. After long distinguished service, the last Buffalo Soldiers unit was disbanded in 1951 in Korea and integrated into other Army units. The last taps for the United States Colored Troops, Buffalo soldiers, and segregated Army service, was for veteran Mark Matthews who died September 6, 2005, at the age of 111. The Buffalo Soldiers National Museum, [BuffaloSoldierMuseum.com](http://BuffaloSoldierMuseum.com), is located in Houston.

## Peter Spencer and the First African-American Church

In part, this article is adapted from "The Life History of Peter Spencer," by Ellen Rendle, Curator of Photographs and Maps, Historical Society of Delaware, which appeared in the *Harriet Tubman Commemorative Newspaper* in 1992.

Pike's Peak is only the Rockies' tenth highest peak but the range's best known. Know the name of the highest? Neither do most people. (It's Mount Elbert.) However it happens, some important historical figures become eclipsed while lesser lights end up in the history books. If not for his last stand, who would know of Custer?

Peter Spencer, trailblazing founder of the United States' first African-American church and first African-American festival, ought to have his place in the pantheon of American social pioneers but few now know of him.

## Thomas Henry, Bridge from South to North, John Brown Ally

*One of an occasional series on Underground Railroad sites and people*

In his post-Civil War autobiography, Reverend Thomas W. Henry alludes to his conducting freedom seekers north from western Maryland to Pennsylvania. As district superintendent and country circuit rider of the African Methodist Episcopal church, he was pastor of the Hagerstown African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington County, Maryland, and tended many flocks there, in Frederick and Allegany Counties in Maryland, and in Franklin County, Pennsylvania. Henry and several of the pastors under his charge worked this entire territory as Underground Railroad conductors and safe-house operators.

Kathleen Snowden, Frederick County's foremost historian of African-Americana, stated,



Peter Spencer and the Union Church



Spencer, born enslaved in Maryland in 1782, was manumitted in his enslaver's will, and moved to Wilmington, Delaware, where he lived the rest of his life. Spencer learned to read and write at a private school, taught himself mechanics, and studied law.

*See Spencer, page 3, column 1*

"Henry never admitted in writing that he was a conductor of the Underground Railroad. Other black preachers and whites said he was. He had to flee Maryland to keep from being arrested when his name was found among John Brown's papers."

When Brown was captured at Harper's Ferry across the Potomac River from Washington and Frederick Counties, his approach was traced back to Washington County's Kennedy Farmhouse where his papers were found. Among them were letters from Rev. Henry who quickly received word of the find and fled to New Jersey where he remained until

*See Henry, page 3, column 3*



## Spencer

When he arrived in Wilmington, Spencer joined the nominally integrated Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church which had always had African-American members who, however, experienced discrimination in the church and were not permitted to occupy leadership roles.

In 1805, Spencer, only 23 at the time, William Anderson, and the other African American parishioners formed an offshoot of the congregation by founding Ezion church. Though it had its own trustees, Ezion's pastors were chosen by the Asbury church which would not consider an African-American. By 1812, when the parent church appointed a pastor opposed by Ezion, Spencer and Anderson made a clean break from Asbury and the Methodist Episcopal church.

In 1813, the congregation purchased a lot in Wilmington from Quaker Thomas Gilpin, built itself a church, and, in an unprecedented move, was able to incorporate it as the Union Church of African Members, the first independent African American church in the United States. The church was among the first of either race or any denomination to open the door to women to become clergy.

The new African Union Church grew quickly and over the next 30 years expanded across four states to 31 congregations, most of which operated schools. The original Union Church in Wilmington served as mother church to the African Union Methodist Episcopal churches nationwide and is still revered as such. The mother church may be visited at [motherafricanunion.org](http://motherafricanunion.org).

Peter Spencer served as pastor of the African Union church from its founding until his death. Spencer stressed the necessity of industry, economic security and self-determination as means of attaining freedom. His message urged economic cooperation among people of African descent, and that African-Americans collectively could accomplish what one person alone could not.

Spencer's legacy went beyond founding the first African American church. Peter Spencer pushed for each of his churches to operate a school, and for African-Americans to become good businesspeople, save their money, and invest it wisely, gaining control of their own lives. In addition to his role as spiritual leader, Spencer also often acted as legal advisor, business advisor, politician and friend to his congregants and the community at large. Blacks and whites alike who did not belong to his church re-

ferred to him as Father Spencer because of the roles he played in bringing communities together.

In 1814, Spencer organized the first Big Quarterly to bring people together and commemorate the founding of the African Union church. Spencer intended the Quarterlies to bring the races together to deal openly with race, culture, religion, society and politics, and to keep alive parts of the African culture. The Quarterlies are still held and serve many of these same purposes today. Through the Civil War, the church also used the Quarterlies as Underground Railroad conduits for slaves heading north.

Spencer challenged white society to educate itself by letting the principles of love and justice guide them. But he placed the burden on the African American community to carve out its freedom and self-government through cooperation, education and determination. Spencer's powerfully positive message resonates as much as ever today.

Spencer and Anderson began an important movement resulting in the creation of multiple Protestant denominations of independent African-American churches. What became the largest, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was founded in 1816 by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones after their successful suit in Pennsylvania courts which found that preventing African Americans from operating independent churches violated the right of freedom of religion which was thus extended to all Americans.

Reverend Peter Spencer died July 25, 1843, at age 61 and was buried in the graveyard of the mother African Union Church in Wilmington. In the 1990s, the City of Wilmington named a prominent portion of its downtown which the church and its graveyard once occupied Peter Spencer Plaza. It is located along the 800 block of French Street, Wilmington. A plaque marks the burial site of Peter and Anne Spencer at the site.

## Did You Know . . .

About two-thirds of claimed Underground Railroad sites have a rating on the 1-to-5 Wellman Scale of 2, "Oral tradition with no reason to doubt." These sites are thus the heart of the Underground Railroad.

Only 4 percent of claims have been able to be substantiated with documentation and get a Wellman Scale rating of 5. Use our July, 2008, issue at Archives on the Free Press website or "Rate Your Underground Railroad Site" on page 2 here to use the Wellman Scale.

## Henry

after the outbreak of the Civil War when he returned home to Maryland.

Working under Rev. Henry's direction, other A.M.E. preachers serving small parishes in his territory comprised an Underground Railroad network. Kathleen Snowden wrote that, "Rev. Daniel Coker, David Smith, William Gaines and other traveling African American preachers not only set up places of worship in the area of Point of Rocks, Doubs, Burkittsville, Pleasant Valley, Mountville, etc., but were helping slaves to escape via the Underground Railroad. These facts are related in records and writings of those who lived it." The churches in these villages under the charge of Reverend Henry were within an area of only ten by five miles. The Doubs and Mountville parishes are still in operation.



The A.M.E. church near Doubs today

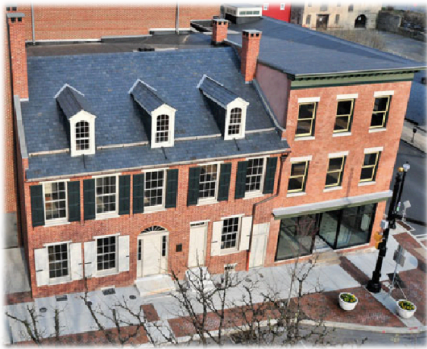
Henry's work as conductor and station operator is described by author William Switala who writes that, at the A.M.E. church at Cumberland, Maryland, which Rev. Henry helped organize, he "operated an Underground Railroad station in the church," states that "Henry served in many A.M.E. churches all throughout northern Maryland and southern Pennsylvania in areas that coincidentally had Underground Railroad activity," and refers to Henry as the "famous missionary and Underground Railroad agent."

Church records show Rev. Henry ministering his Hagerstown church from 1844 until 1883 when he died by which time the church had been renamed Ebenezer A.M.E. Church. When the old Underground Railroad conductor died, he was "the then oldest member of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church." Ebenezer A.M.E. Church was razed a few years ago and replaced with a modern building nearby.

## Harris

This January, the 52-page escape account written by Underground Railroad fugitive O. C. Gilbert was discovered by his great-great-granddaughter in a Philadelphia antique store. In it, Gilbert reveals being sheltered by Stevens in his South Queen Street home in Lancaster. With this conclusive proof of the home's safe-house use, Harris was able to prevent its demolition to make room for a convention center.

Stevens, far ahead of his time, lived with his African-American common-law wife, Lydia Smith, and fathered the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments to the Constitution. Visit [stevensandsmith.org](http://stevensandsmith.org) for more.



The Stevens home and law office

Harris also led a campaign to preserve the Zercher Hotel in Christiana, Pennsylvania, the only surviving building relating to the Christiana Resistance (or Christiana Riot) of 1851, in which African American Underground Railroad activists confronted an armed slave owner and a posse intent on recapturing two fugitive slaves, resulting in the death of the slave owner and the complete defeat of his posse. Both white and African American abolitionists were subsequently subjected to a reign of terror by the administration of Millard Fillmore, who ordered several participants to be put on trial for treason in an effort to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Fugitive Slave Law. The prosecution failed, in one of the most important legal defeats for that law. The Zercher Hotel was used by various involved individuals during and after the confrontation. Thanks to Harris's efforts, the building has now become a museum devoted to the events of 1851.

Harris also won landmark status for a section of the Pennsylvania Railroad line in Lancaster County, traveled by countless fugitives, many dispatched by the noted Underground Railroad agent William Whipper, of nearby Columbia.

Harris is a historian with a private practice in neighborhood preservation and community development.

## Princes

Historic Site and Museum. The Museum and the Buxton community demonstrate to thousands each year the importance of conserving the fragile remnants of the proud history that Buxton represents.

Throughout their 32-year marriage, the Princes have provided leadership in sharing newly discovered narratives about the fates of Underground Railroad refugees who made their home in Canada in the tumultuous years before the Civil War. They have lectured extensively across Canada and the United States, and are founders of the annual Canadian/United States Black History and Genealogy Conference that brings together scholars from across the continent.

Husband and wife are both well known in the North American heritage community and beyond. Both have been members of numerous Canadian and American organizations including the Ontario Underground Railroad Alliance, the African Canadian Heritage Network, and York University's Harriet Tubman Institute.

Bryan Prince is recognized as today's preeminent historian of 19<sup>th</sup> century African Canada and has authored a number of Underground Railroad works including the award-winning "I Came As A Stranger: The Underground Railroad," his most recent volume "A Shadow on the Household," and the documentary "A Thousand Miles to Freedom."

Shannon Prince has served as Curator of the Buxton Museum and National Historic Site since 1999, and as co-chair of Ontario's National Historic Sites Alliance. A much sought storyteller, she performs in the stage production of the historical drama *Rainbows and Wings*.

Prize-winning Canadian Underground Railroad author Karolyn Smardz Frost says that the Princes are the authors and performers of a remarkable series of original dramatizations that bring the experiences of early Black Ontario pioneers to life for thousands. The plays are based on the time that their ancestors first took the perilous road northward to Canada. The Princes have lectured and performed across North America and star in the *Road to Freedom* concerts now on CD. They narrate the actual words of those once enslaved who found the strength and courage to seek freedom, and of Underground Railroad agents who risked all for a higher cause.

A *Road to Freedom* concert highlighted the 2007 ceremony awarding an honorary doctorate by Toronto's York University to Governor General Michaëlle Jean, Queen Elizabeth II's representative in Canada.

## Regan-Dinius

Underground Railroad activities throughout the state, and a volunteer network which gathers and exchanges information about the Underground Railroad. A useful aspect of the effort is that the State program and the private group have forged a unified presence by using the same name, Indiana Freedom Trails.

The private Indiana Freedom Trails entity, a nonprofit corporation, is a paid membership association which maintains an Underground Railroad event calendar, arranges tours, awards student scholarships, coordinates its activities with the public Indiana Freedom Trails entity, and holds quarterly board meetings.

In building Indiana's model state program, Regan-Dinius lectures and mounts Underground Railroad workshops not only in Indiana but throughout the upper Midwest. Regan-Dinius, the Indiana Freedom Trails board of directors, and the private organization's statewide volunteer network have uncovered and woven together an unprecedentedly extensive history of Underground Railroad stories and sites, African-American settlements, abolitionist activities and significant legal cases. One project catalogued all of the Indiana mentions in Wilbur Siebert's 1898 *The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom*.

Regan-Dinius was the prime mover behind nominating the Alexander T. Rankin House in Fort Wayne, Indiana, to the National Register of Historic Places. Her research did much to illuminate the wide extent of Rankin's Underground Railroad activity in the upper Midwest. Without the contexts uncovered by Regan-Dinius's perseverance, "it would have been very difficult to understand the significance of the Rankin House, especially since it would not have qualified under any other National Register criterion" says Diebold.

Regan-Dinius says the early keys to establishing viable state Underground Railroad programs are solid interest by the state government in the program, gathering private-sector and other government agency partners, and settling on a workable division of labor among them.

When asked what is the best approach for other states to take in launching or strengthening Underground Railroad programs, Regan-Dinius emphasizes the need for a dedicated champion of the effort, identifying Underground Railroad enthusiasts, organizing them formally or informally, avoiding turf battles and unconstructive personalities, and putting the emphasis on organizing.

Visit [IndianaFreedomTrails.org](http://IndianaFreedomTrails.org) for more.