



UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FREE PRESS®

Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

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Straight, Smith and Corban Named 2013 Free Press Prize Laureates



Wendy Straight



David G. Smith



Kenn Corban

In the sixth annual awarding of the Underground Railroad Free Press prizes, the Free Press Panel of Judges has named Wendy Straight, David Smith, and the board of directors and president of Owen Lovejoy Homestead, Inc. as the 2013 winners.

Wendy Straight is receiving the 2013 Free Press Prize in Leadership for what one expert has called the gold standard of research, biography and diligence in her work uncovering the Underground Railroad in Chautauqua County, New York, where she lives.

The judges named David G. Smith winner of the 2013 Hortense Simmons Prize for the Advancement of Knowledge for his exemplary 2013 history, *On the Edge of Freedom: The Fugitive Slave Issue in South Central Pennsylvania, 1820-1870*.

The board of directors of Princeton, Illinois' Lovejoy Homestead and its president, Kenn Corban, have been awarded the 2013 preservation prize for their long work supporting the City of Princeton, which owns the Homestead, in restoring the former Underground Railroad safe-house and getting it listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Free Press is delighted once again to award these annual prizes and we congratulate this year's winners. We thank the Free Press Prize Panel of Judges who made this year's selections, and our readers and others who put forth nominations.

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Princeton, Illinois' Owen Lovejoy Homestead Safe-house

One of an occasional series on Underground Railroad sites

Located only forty miles from the Mississippi River, the Owen Lovejoy safe-house lies on one of the westernmost Underground Railroad routes. Nevertheless, because of the flow of fugitives up the river and across it from Missouri, freedom seeker traffic on the Quincy Line rivaled that seen on eastern and Ohio routes.

From 1838 when he began living in the newly built home, Rev. Owen Lovejoy became perhaps the best known of Illinois' safe-house operators.

After a period of deterioration in the mid-twentieth century, a local group restored the home, the state purchased it, and in 1972 it was deeded to the City of Princeton. The private group has con-

tinued to operate the home which is open to the public through September and by appointment in October. For more visit LovejoyHomestead.com.



Should African-American history have its own museum?

By Jane O'Brien

The following article was reprinted with permission of *BBC News Magazine*, (bbc.co.uk/news/magazine). The article ran in the June 23, 2013 edition of the magazine. The author works in the Washington bureau of BBC, the British Broadcasting Corporation.

A new museum in the US capital will highlight the history and culture of African Americans. But does displaying these artifacts separately contribute to a culture of segregation?

This week, the US Supreme Court is expected to make a decision about the legality of affirmative action programmes that allow universities to consider race as a factor in admissions. [The Court affirmed the right.] Detractors argue that affirmative action is unnecessary in modern America and contributes to discrimination. Proponents say the programmes remain a vital way to counter centuries of racism and inequality in America.

Just blocks away from the Supreme Court in Washington, a similar debate is going on about a shawl, some shards of glass, and other historic artifacts. They're items designated for the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

It hasn't been built yet, but its administrators, the new conservators of black history in the US, promise a venue that will enrich the nation's understanding of a racial heritage that continues to divide many Americans.

"We are testing ideas that are difficult for Americans," says museum director Lonnie Bunch, "but you will find truth, reconciliation and healing around issues that have divided us for centuries. Here is a chance to understand the rich cultured history of African Americans and a chance for African Americans themselves to grapple with a tortured past."

It's a bold mission for a museum whose own creation in many ways mirrors African Americans' struggles in society. The idea for the museum was first suggested almost a hundred years ago but was thwarted by lawmakers who maintained that black people had contributed nothing to the US. It was raised again during the 1960s civil rights era, but the federally funded Smithsonian Institution (to which the museum belongs) preferred instead to incorporate black history within its existing museums. It wasn't until 2003 that

President George W. Bush signed a bill guaranteeing that Congress would pay half the \$500m (£325m) needed to build the museum.

Ground was broken by President Barack Obama in 2012 and construction is well underway on the site in the shadow of the Washington Monument at the centre of the National Mall. Funding efforts were given a boost when media celebrity Oprah Winfrey donated \$12m in addition to the \$1m she gave in 2007.

And from having no items to display just a few years ago, the objects themselves are rolling in. Some 22,000 have now been collected including a rare Bible belonging to Nat Turner, leader of an 1831 slave revolt. Among other artifacts are a lace shawl given by Queen Victoria to Harriet Tubman, shards of glass from the Alabama church where four girls were killed in a 1963 bombing, and shackles belonging to African slaves. They are already on exhibition at the nearby National Museum of American History but will have pride of place in the African-American counterpart when it opens in 2015. The completed museum will have visitors to walk over a water feature - homage to African slaves' passage across the Atlantic.

Other minority groups are also hoping for a presence in the nation's capital. Washington, DC, is already home to the National Museum of the American Indian, but the National Women's History Museum is an online institution that is lobbying Congress for a building on the Mall, as is a group called Friends of the National Museum of the American Latino.

But does giving each group its own museum - separate from the main Museum of American History - further segregate those who should be part of the American "melting pot" experience? Does it give special treatment to marginalised groups?

Virginia Congressman Jim Moran objected to the museum on those grounds. "The Museum of American History is where all the white folks are going to go, and the American Indian Museum is where Indians are going to feel at home. And African Americans are going to go to their own museum. And Latinos are going to go their own museum. And that's not what America is all about," he told a [Congressional committee in 2011](#). "It's a matter of how we depict the American story and where do we stop? The next



Glass shards and a bullet casing from the bombing which killed four children at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama in 1963

one will probably be Asian Americans. The next, God help us, will probably be Irish Americans."

But defenders say the museum fills an important void. "The reasons for the existence of a National Museum of African American History and Culture are just as valid as they are for those other museums," says Leslie Hinkson, an assistant professor of sociology at Georgetown University. "Until black history becomes properly woven into the story of America as opposed to stitched on at the fringes, then it's necessary."

Mr. Bunch says the museum will describe "the quintessential American story." It's not a black museum for black people," he says. The debate over black history, how best to tell it, and its place in the wider American story remains controversial because the US is still grappling with race, says Mr. Bunch. "Slavery is still the last great unmentionable in American life," he says. "Part of the challenge for Americans is that we've always framed ourselves as the good guys. We saved Europe in World War II, we fought the communists. So it's hard to say that this is a story where some of us are culpable. Wrestling with that is a painful thing."

To tackle such thorny issues, the Smithsonian Institution, the museum's umbrella organisation, employed psychologists and conducted extensive research into potential audiences and how to engage them. Surveys predict 70% of the new museum's visitors will be white.

And when the Supreme Court does decide the validity of affirmative action in university admissions, expect that story one day to be told at the National Museum of African American History and Culture as well.

Editorial: How Free Press Got Started

There was a long period of decline in knowledge of the Underground Railroad between 1913 when Harriet Tubman, the last major figure of the Underground Railroad to die, passed on and the 1960s when grade school and high school teachers on their own, and then school districts, began introducing the Underground Railroad into their teaching.

Slowly, this American reacquaintance with the Underground Railroad took hold until, as *Free Press* research has shown, a person who graduated from high school in the 1990s had an 80 percent chance of having had school instruction on the Underground Railroad, up from only 20 percent who were of high school age in the 1960s.

A signal event in rekindling interest in the Underground Railroad was the 1996 *Smithsonian* article on Anthony Cohen's walk retracing his freedom seeker ancestor's flight from Sandy Spring, Maryland, to Canada. This sparked interest by the federal government and the creation in 1998 of its first of three Underground Railroad programs, the National Park Service's Network to Freedom. Since then the Smithsonian Institution and the United States Department of Education have also established Underground Railroad programs along with a growing number of states.

The 2000s saw wholesale advancement of interest in the Underground Railroad with Underground Railroad site owners opening their properties to the public, rediscoveries of sites, the founding of major Underground Railroad institutions, a spate of good books, and a swelling reawakening of the nation-defining moral phenomenon that was the Underground Railroad. What began to emerge was an international Underground Railroad community of people, sites, programs and organizations with a keen interest in the Underground Railroad.

But without anything to tie it together, the burgeoning community ran the risk of dissipating just as it had waned in the collective memory after Tubman's passing. The community needed a friendly nexus to gather and focus it.

In his fifties, and after four bankruptcies with failed small-town hotels he had bought, his family could only shake their heads when he bought yet another and gave his dream one more try. But this time, Conrad Hilton, by then having learned the trade, launched what became the world's largest hotel chain. Lincoln lost election after election until winning the presidency. Washington lost as many battles as he won before Yorktown.

As with many successful ventures, *Underground Railroad Free Press* got its start after the misfire of a similar effort by others.

In 2004, the National Parks Conservation Association hosted a meeting of Underground Railroad activists from around the nation to map out the formation of a new body that would serve as a private-sector promoter and nexus of Underground Railroad work throughout the country. That September, about a dozen people met in Baltimore for the organizational meeting of Friends of the Underground Railroad, directors and officers were elected, and the organization was incorporated as a non-profit corporation in New York State.

Sixteen months later, Friends as it was called flew apart amidst personality clashes, mysteriously cancelled board meetings, absence of leadership, and fitful efforts to organize itself. In early 2006, the last three directors refunded dues to members, wound



Old Inky sets *Free Press*'s type

down operations and allowed the organization to go dormant.

But during Friends of the Underground Railroad's brief existence, a number of good ideas had been brought forth, the outline of a central body for the international Underground Railroad community had begun to take shape, and the programs which Friends needed to launch to operate as a gathering point for the community were sketched out. This healthy framework of ideas survived its troubled source.

Free Press publisher Peter Michael who had served on the Friends board of directors as its treasurer saw the promise of the failed organization's trial run, and began thinking about molding its failure into something new. Using strategic planning expertise from his professional practice, Michael Strategic Analysis, Michael put together a start-up plan emphasizing comity of principals, sound vision and planning, filling conspicuous organizational voids in the international Underground Railroad community, and tying the community together with regular communication.

Michael decided to brand the new organization after what would be its news publication and began searching for the right name. After compiling a long list of well-known national newspaper names, one stood out for an Underground Railroad publication: *Free Press*. *Underground Railroad Free Press* — the organization and its publication — were born with *Free Press* issue number one in July, 2006.

At the same time, Michael sought to fill the doughnut hole in the international Underground Railroad community by building *Free Press* into the central registry of contemporary Underground Railroad organizations and programs, the "go to" place for the community and the growing number of North Americans and others becoming acquainted with the Underground Railroad. This led in 2006 to the launching of Lynx, the registry operated by *Free Press*, and the same year Datebook, the community's central events calendar. Datebook grew full flower in a matter of months. Lynx has grown to over 125 today, believed to be a high majority of all Underground Railroad organizations and programs in existence.

Another void in community was that no one really knew exactly who or what it was. How many people were involved in today's Underground Railroad work? For how long? What were their Underground Railroad knowledge and experience? What do they do for a living? How old are they? Where do they get their Underground Railroad information? In 2007, Michael Stra-

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Getting Started

tegic Analysis donated the first known survey of the Underground Railroad community, answering these questions and more. The Free Press Survey of the International Underground Railroad Community has been conducted each year since. Each July issue of *Free Press* runs a summary of that year's survey, with full results reported and downloadable at the *Free Press* website.

Through a range of methods including an annual survey question inviting respondents to sign up new subscribers, write-ins throughout the year, and referrals from readers, the *Free Press* subscription base has grown from its initial 600 subscribers in 2006 to nearly 5,000 today. *Free Press* is distributed electronically and is free. Because many readers forward their copies to others, the current estimated readership of *Free Press* is about 150,000, now going well beyond the involved Underground Railroad community. A few readers report that they each forward every issue to over a thousand others, while quite a few forward in the hundreds.

In the days of Friends of the Underground Railroad, its vice president, the well-regarded Underground Railroad researcher Dr. Judith Wellman, one day said something along the lines of, "With all of this good Underground Railroad work going on, someone ought to give a prize for it." This stuck fast in Michael's mind and in 2008 he recruited an esteemed group to comprise the founding Free Press Prize Panel of Judges who since have awarded annual prizes in contemporary Underground Railroad leadership, preservation and advancement of knowledge, the top honors in the international Underground Railroad community. The first judge recruited was Judy Wellman who this year retired. The backgrounds and photos of judges who sit on the current panel may be seen at the *Free Press* website, and the three 2013 prize winners are announced in this issue. The eighteen winning individuals and organizations since 2008 comprise Americans and Canadians, safe-house owners and operators, executives, boards, advocates, program stewards, authors and hard-working rank-and-file enthusiasts.

Recognizing that the Underground Railroad was a thoroughly international enterprise, *Free Press* since its founding has operated with a multinational outlook.

Its reporting, subscribers, judges, prize winners, Lynx listings, Datebook events, survey takers and outlook are all deliberately international. *Free Press* subscribers extend as far as Eastern Europe and the Caribbean, and perhaps to other lands.

The face of the Free Press organization is its bimonthly publication, *Underground Railroad Free Press*, in its forty-fourth edition this month, the primary aim of which is to gather and publish the most important news of the contemporary Underground Railroad community. *Free Press* has grown from its original two pages and short articles in its early years to typically five or six pages with a mix of short news articles and longer topical pieces in recent years. The publication's 2012 facelift has lent a more modern feel and room for more images. Every issue has an editorial and some feature our occasional series highlighting historic Underground Railroad safe-houses and routes. Recent years have seen more guest articles on a wide variety of topics by both the famous and those in the trenches. When we see an excellent article elsewhere that we think our readers would like, we reprint with permission, and over the last few years have run pieces from *The Atlantic*, the *New York Times* and other major publications. This issue features Jane O'Brien's article from *British Broadcasting Corporation News Magazine*. *Free Press* readers and survey takers seem to think that we are on the right track, as their evaluations of the *Free Press* publication and programs consistently rate us at eight to ten on a ten-point evaluation scale. From far back in the pack as the newest of seven Underground Railroad news competitors in 2006, *Free Press* now enjoys nearly a 70-percent market share. Readers have been frank and generous with their suggestions for improvement and, whenever we can, we incorporate them into our operations.

The challenges ahead involve better monetizing *Free Press*, continuous improvement of the news product and programs, and, before too much longer, succession planning. We are most grateful to the Underground Railroad community which has received us so well, encouraged us, and lent its wisdom to what we continue to try to accomplish.

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Winners

Wendy Straight

Straight's nominator feels "that Straight is precisely the kind of local historian who will benefit most from the Free Press Prize, by helping to draw attention to work which might otherwise go unnoticed outside her immediate vicinity."

One of the most useful, if long-neglected, accounts of the Underground Railroad is Eber Pettit's 1879 "Sketches in the History of the Underground Railroad," anecdotally describing the operation of the Underground in westernmost New York State. Pettit was himself a station master, and significant figure in the local Underground Railroad. Chautauqua County was a major center of Underground Railroad activity, with fugitives being moved in several directions, mainly from south to north, from western Pennsylvania to Lake Erie, and from west to east, from Ohio along the coast of the lake toward Buffalo and Canada.

Wendy Straight, a surveyor, former teacher and historian, has carried out a thorough investigation of underground sites in Chautauqua County, correlating Pettit's and other early sources' often fleeting references to conductors and station masters with scores of existing and identifiable sites, and exhaustively researched the background of Underground Railroad activists who had been largely lost to history, prior to her effort. Straight's project, easily accessed on the Chautauqua County history website, is a monumental undertaking, and represents the gold standard for local history research of this time. It has dramatically advanced knowledge of the Underground Railroad in an area where it once thrived, and should also serve as a model for comparable research projects in other regions.

A significant part of Straight's accomplishment is her exceptionally lucid map of both documented and not yet confirmed Underground Railroad sites in Chautauqua County and neighboring counties, revealing patterns of activity and the proximity of local activists. In addition, her copious profiles of scores of activists are models of scholarship, relevance, and detail. Fascinating in themselves, they also provide a baseline for further research by other historians. They also indicate many significant links with abolitionists outside the immediate area.

David G. Smith

In *On the Edge of Freedom*, David G. Smith breaks new ground illuminating the unique development of antislavery sentiment in south central Pennsylvania with a complicated history of slavery, antislavery activism, and unequal freedom. During the antebellum decades, many fugitive slaves escaping by land east of the Appalachians had to pass through the region where they faced significant opportunities and substantial risks. While fugitives traveling through south central Pennsylvania (Adams, Franklin, and Cumberland counties) during this time were aided by an effective Underground Railroad, they also faced slave catchers and informers. Underground work helping fugitives appealed to border antislavery activists who shied away from agitating for immediate abolition in a region with social, economic, and kinship ties to the South. And, as early antislavery protests met fierce resistance, area activists adopted a less confrontational approach, employing the more traditional political tools of the petition and legal action.

Smith traces victories of south central Pennsylvania antislavery activists, including a strong personal liberty law and aggressive prosecution of kidnappers who seized African American fugitives. He documents how their success provoked Southern re-

taliation and passage of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. The Civil War intensified debate over fugitives, as hundreds sought safety in the area, and scores were recaptured by the Confederate army during the Gettysburg campaign.

On the Edge of Freedom explores in captivating detail the fugitive slave issue through fifty years of sectional conflict, war, and reconstruction in south central Pennsylvania, and provocatively questions what was gained by activists' pragmatic approach of emphasizing fugitive slaves over immediate abolition and full equality. Smith argues that after the war, social and demographic changes in southern Pennsylvania worked against African Americans' equal opportunity, and although local literature portrayed this area as a vanguard of the Underground Railroad, African Americans still lived "on the edge of freedom." By the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan was rallying near the Gettysburg battlefield, and south central Pennsylvania became, in some ways, as segregated as the Jim Crow South. The fugitive slave issue, by reinforcing images of dependency, may have actually worked against the achievement of lasting social change.

Dr. Smith is a historian with Booz Allen Hamilton.

Lovejoy Homestead Board and Its President, Kenn Corban

Owen Lovejoy was one of the most famous Underground Railroad operators, not only in Illinois but in the United States.

In 1838, Owen Lovejoy moved to Princeton, Bureau County, Illinois, where he became minister of the Congregational Church. In Princeton, he located himself at a strategic point on the Quincy Line of the western Illinois Underground Railroad, hid fugitive slaves in his home and from there helped usher them northward. Unlike most Underground Railroad operators, Lovejoy openly proclaimed his efforts to aid escaping fugitives.

Lovejoy was connected to important Underground Railroad conductors who lived close by: Geneseo's William T. Allan, an agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society; Toulon's Samuel G. Wright who made diary entries on his Underground Railroad involvement with Lovejoy; Lee County agent John Cross; and several operators in Galesburg, the state's most notorious Underground Railroad haven. In 1837, Owen Lovejoy's brother Elijah, editor of the *Alton Observer*, an anti-slavery newspaper published in Illinois just across the Mississippi river from St. Louis, was murdered by a mob, a watershed for the anti-slavery movement noticed throughout the nation.

In 1854, Lovejoy was elected to the Illinois legislature and served in the United States House of Representatives from 1856 to 1864. There he was vilified by southern congressmen who he made fully aware of his Underground Railroad activity in the Prairie State. *Owen Lovejoy- Abolitionist in Congress*, the definitive biography, was written by Edward Magdol in 1967.

Lovejoy's Princeton home was constructed in 1837 and owned by the family until 1931. In 1970, \$30,000 was obtained from the State of Illinois for restoration which was completed in 1972. In 1997, the property was declared a National Historic Landmark.

The Lovejoy homestead is owned and partially funded by the city of Princeton. Operations, budgeting, maintenance and marketing are conducted by The Lovejoy Homestead, Inc., the nonprofit organization whose board and president are the recipients of the 2013 Free Press Prize in Preservation. The Lovejoy homestead is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday afternoons, May to October. Visitors numbers vary from year to year with an annual average of approximately 1,000.