



Network to Freedom



In Pursuit of Freedom

Run-away Negroes have resided in these places for twelve, twenty, or thirty years and upwards, subsisting themselves in the swamp upon corn, hogs, and fowls, that they raised on some of the spots not perpetually under water, nor subject to be flooded, as forty-nine parts out of fifty of it are; and on such spots they have erected habitations, and cleared small fields around them; yet these have always been perfectly impenetrable to any of the inhabitants of the country around, even to those nearest to and best acquainted with the swamps.

1784, John Ferdinand Smyth, *A Tour of the United States of America*.



Whitfield Lovell, "Sanctuary: The Great Dismal Swamp," 2002, (Installation view) at the Center for Contemporary Art, Virginia Beach, Virginia. Photo: Glen McClure.

In October 2002, the staff at the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (Virginia) learned of an art exhibit opening at the Virginia Contemporary Arts Center entitled "Sanctuary: The Great Dismal Swamp." The artist, Whitfield Lovell, created the work which included *recreating* the Great Dismal Swamp within two rooms of the Art Center and charcoal sketches of the African Americans who may have found sanctuary there. Completing the work was the sounds of timber cutting, muffled voices of workers, and baying hounds.

A few months later, the National Park Service contacted the refuge to discuss including the Great Dismal Swamp in the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. Working with Wanda McLean of Elizabeth City State University (North Carolina) and NPS mentors, 18th and 19th century documents were researched and an application submitted to the Network to Freedom in July 2003. By the time the application was submitted, the "owner group" for the nomination included the US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, North Carolina Department of Transportation, North Carolina Division of Parks

and Recreation, and Elizabeth City State University. The application was unanimously approved by the Network to Freedom coordinators.

To celebrate the recognition of the Great Dismal Swamp's role in the quest for freedom, the National Wildlife Refuge, in partnership with their Friend's group, the Great Dismal Swamp Coalition, the City of Chesapeake, Virginia, the Dismal Swamp Canal Welcome Center, and the Public Affairs Office of the US Army Corps of Engineers, planned a ceremony and luncheon. On

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February 13, 2004, over 270 people gathered at the Chesapeake Conference Center to participate in the celebration.

The celebration was held included a luncheon and program. NPS presented “certificates of acceptance” to representatives of the five sites that comprise the Great Dismal Swamp listing. Descendants of Moses Grandy, an enslaved laborer on the Dismal

The sites recognized in the ceremony have traditionally worked together on various projects, particularly interpretive events. They will continue to do so, and have even discussed the possibility of installing similarly designed interpretive panels at each location. For the Great Dismal Swamp Wildlife Refuge, the designation means a new interpretive message that provides an opportunity to entice people who may not have considered visiting the refuge in the past.



Descendants of Moses Grandy. Photo: Julie Rowand

Swamp Canal, were honored with a plaque presented by Colonel Yvonne Prettyman-Beck, to commemorate the role their ancestor played in building the canal. Dan Sayers, a PhD student at the College of William and Mary gave the keynote talk on his archeological investigations of African American habitation of the Swamp. Dignitaries offering remarks included US Congressmen Walter Jones, Jr. (NC) and J. Randy Forbes, Mayor William Ward, and Mr. Marvin Moriarty, regional director of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Friends' Group

Dear Friends of the Underground Railroad,

Please accept this invitation to join the National Underground Railroad Friends' Group for our first national meeting and congressional lobby day on April 28-29, 2004 in Washington, DC. This effort is a direct result of an initial meeting organized in Spring 2003 by Barbara Woods of St Louis, MI. I have been retained by the National Park Foundation to take Barbara's work a step further and get the Friends' Group off the ground.

The purpose of this gathering is two-fold— to let our representatives know that we are still watching when it comes to the preservation of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program, and to finalize plans for the formation of a Friend's Group. Many of you may ask, “why another Underground Railroad group?” The answer is that there is no national group that is working directly to preserve this story as well as support the people on the ground in communities around the country. As a result local programs and sites continue to suffer.

Additionally, for the second time in four years the National Parks Conservation Association has listed the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program on it's 10 Most Endangered List. This means that the National Park Service, which is

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Friends' Group

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the agency mandated to preserve America's national heritage, is not receiving the necessary funding or support from Congress or agency leadership to keep this program alive. The time is now for us to act. We cannot continue to let the Underground Railroad legacy die in the minds of those that are charged with providing the resources necessary to preserve this story for current and future generations.

Therefore the National Underground Railroad Friend's Group invites you to join us for this much needed event. The meeting will be hosted by the National Parks Conservation Association which is located at 1300 19th Street, NW. We cannot make this happen without you. Please contact me at 301-292-6677 or Email igwright@earthlink.net, if you are interested in participating or if you would like more information.

Peace and blessings,
Iantha Gantt-Wright

Contribute to the Newsletter

Help us to make the newsletter more informative and useful to the Underground Railroad community. Please forward items of interest, articles, or topic suggestions for consideration to Diane Miller at NPS, 1709 Jackson Street, Omaha, Nebraska 68102 or at diane_miller@nps.gov. Comments on the newsletter are also welcome.

Newsletter deadlines are January 15 and July 15 each year.

Freedom in the Florida Territory

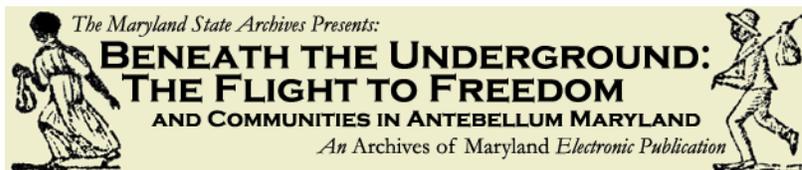
From January 29-31, 2004, approximately 100 people gathered in at the University of Miami, Coral Gables, to participate in "Freedom in the Florida Territory: American and Caribbean Connections to the Underground Railroad." Presented by the Network to Freedom Program the University of Miami Interdisciplinary Studies Department, the South Florida Caribbean Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit, the Black Archives Foundation, the Florida Underground Railroad Project and the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, this conference was devoted to exploring the resistance to enslavement through escape and flight in Florida and the Caribbean.

The highlight of the conference was the keynote address by Dr. Jane Landers of Vanderbilt University, author of numerous books including *Black Society in Spanish Florida*. Session papers from leading researchers covered such topics as resistance, Haiti, literary influences, Seminoles, maroon communi-



Dr. Jane Landers' keynote address. Photo: Barbara Tagger

ties, research techniques, visual artifacts, and interpreting historic Florida. In addition to presentations, the conference attendees were treated to several performances. The opening reception included a compelling interpretive program by Ralph Smith called "Abraham, Black Seminole". During the lunch break on Friday, diners watched Charlotte Battin in her one woman play "Freedom is My Home". The conference closed Saturday afternoon with an event at Lummus Park, which included a griot, book signing and Florida Memorial College Steel Band.



The beginning of the "Beneath the Underground Project" was undertaken largely thanks to a Network to Freedom grant from the National Park Service (NPS). In May 2001, the Maryland State Archives was designated a Network to Freedom Program Research Facility status.

While freedom seekers were still in the South, they were only able to rely on limited support. They had to rely on their own sources of aid and information to escape, with only the hope of further assistance once in the free states. This story of slave flight, and how the geography, laws, and communities of Mary-

land as a slave state aided or hindered escape, is the story "Beneath the Underground: the Flight to Freedom" seeks to reclaim. Working with primary materials in the Archives, interns catalogued and digitized census data on the African American population—both slave and free, court records, and newspaper advertisements. Phase one of the project focused on Baltimore, Frederick, and Prince George's counties.

For more information about the project and the final report of the Network to Freedom grant, visit <http://www.mdslavery.net/>.

Congratulations to the New Network Listings

The National Park Service regional coordinator committee, at a public meeting in Buffalo, New York, on September 17, 2003, accepted the following sites, programs, and facilities into the Network to Freedom. The Network now includes 149 listings in 26 states and DC.

District of Columbia

Asbury United Methodist Church [site]
Woodlawn Cemetery [site]

Indiana

Historic Eleutherian College [site]
Lyman Hoyt House [site]

Kentucky

Institute for Freedom Studies [program]

New York

Jervis Langdon Home [site]

North Carolina

Roanoke Island Freedom Colony Memorial Garden [site]
Great Dismal Swamp [site]**

Pennsylvania

Chester County Historical Society [facility]
First National Bank Museum [facility]
Library and Archives, Erie County Historical Society [facility]
Pennsylvania State Archives [facility]
William C. Goodridge House [site]
Willis House [site]
Zercher's Hotel [site]

Virginia

Afro-American Historical Association of Fauquier County [facility]
Great Dismal Swamp [site]**
Loudoun County Courthouse [site]
Petersburg Courthouse [site]
Sully Plantation [site]

Wisconsin

Jonathan Walker's Homesite [site]

** Great Dismal Swamp is located in both North Carolina and Virginia

What We Thought We Knew. . .

Conventional wisdom tells us that California was admitted to the Union as a free state, and slavery, therefore, was prohibited. As with other myths of American history, it turns out that this is not the case. Many believe that slavery was banned in California when it entered the Union as a free state under the Compromise of 1850—a set of agreements that also gave us the Fugitive Slave Act. However, a look at primary source material provides an abundance of proof that shows slavery existed in California. Newspapers describe slave escapes, ads offer slaves for sale, and court records list freedom papers and cases involving enslavement. It is estimated that at any time there were between 200-300 enslaved African Americans in mining areas. In addition, California Indians also were held as slaves during this

period. De facto slavery was still practiced for many years after its legal abolition. Some slaveholders tried to hide enslaved people in remote mining and rural areas to avoid possible loss.

felt little risk in bringing small numbers of slaves to California because they believed that the National Fugitive Slave Law, passed as part of the compromise of 1850, would support their claims. Some slaves brought to California were given the opportunity to gain freedom through arrangements with slaveholders. Some were allowed to purchase freedom for themselves and family members, while others gained release from bondage by working for a specific period of time. Self-liberation was chosen by the bold, who knew that in the early years no police system existed to keep them in servile roles, and they escaped, heading out for parts un-

The following curious advertisement—the first of the sale of a negro in this State—occurs in the columns of the same paper :—

NEGRO FOR SALE.—On Saturday, the 26th inst., I will sell at Public Auction, a Negro Man, he having agreed to said sale in preference to being sent home I value him at \$300, but if any or all of his abolition brethren wish to show that they have the first honorable principle about them, they can have an opportunity of releasing said Negro slave from bondage, by calling on the subscriber, at the Southern House, previous to that time, and paying \$100. I make this great sacrifice in the value of the property, to satisfy myself whether they prefer paying a small sum to release him, or play their old game, and try to steal him. If not redeemed, the sale will take place in front of the Southern House, 87 J street, at 10 o'clock of said day.

June 17-tdX. B. G. LATHROP.

San Francisco Herald, June 18, 1852

Many Southern slave owners saw the Gold Rush as a chance to extend slavery into Western territory. They

known.

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Candidates for Seventh Round

The following candidates are being considered for inclusion in the Network to Freedom in the seventh round of applications. On March 31, 2004, at the Black Voice Media Center, Bailey Building 1590 Waterman Ave., San Bernardino, California, the NPS regional coordinator committee will review and vote on these applications. The public is invited to attend. For further information or to comment on the applications, please consult the Network website at www.cr.nps.gov/ugrr, or contact Diane Miller at National Park Service, 1709 Jackson St., Omaha, Nebraska 68102 or at 402-221-3749.

Facilities

California

- California State Library, Sacramento

DC

- [Howard University] Moorland Spingarn Research Center
- Washingtoniana Div., Martin Luther King Library

Ohio

- Oberlin Heritage Center/O.H.I.O., Oberlin

Pennsylvania

- Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
- State Library of Pennsylvania, Harrisburg

Programs

Delaware

- Star Hill Historical Society, Dover vicinity

Massachusetts

- Discovering New Bedford's Underground Railroad History, New Bedford Whaling NHP, New Bedford

Michigan

- Journey to Freedom Underground Railroad Tours, Ann Arbor

Texas

- Escape to Freedom (Harriet Tubman play), Houston, TX

Sites

California

- Mary Ellen Pleasant Burial Site, Napa
- Mary Ellen Pleasant Memorial, San Francisco, CA [site]

DC

- Blanche K. Bruce House

Delaware

- Delaware State House Museum, Dover
- New Castle Courthouse, New Castle

Florida

- Fort Jefferson, Dry Tortugas

Indiana

- Georgetown District, Madison

Iowa

- City of Cincinnati
- Denmark Congregational Church, Denmark
- Ira Blanchard Home Site and Cemetery, Percival
- Lewelling House, Salem

Kentucky

- White Hall, Augusta

Maryland

- Belair Mansion, Bowie
- Marietta House Museum, Glenn Dale

Massachusetts

- Hart and Mary Leavitt House, Charlemont
- Roger Hooker and Keziah Leavitt House, Charlemont

Michigan

- Jonathan Walker Grave and Marker, Muskegon

North Carolina

- Colonial Park, Edenton

Ohio

- Bunker Hill House, Camden
- Jonathan Wright Home, Springboro
- Rev. William King Site, Delta
- Westwood Cemetery, Oberlin

Tennessee

- Stones River NB, Murfreesboro

Texas

- Seminole Indian Scouts Cemetery, Brackettville

Virginia

- Monclure Conway House, Falmouth

. . . but didn't

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An exciting new project at the California State University, Sacramento (CSUS), is bringing the documentary evidence of this chapter of our history to life. According to Library Director and Dean Terry Web, the project launched as part of the University's celebration of Black History Month 2004, "will use high quality digital images of letters, journals,

photographs, documents, newspapers and more to tell the often overlooked experiences of African-American slaves in California and provide students, teachers, and the general public with invaluable information for studying and learning about this part of California history."

Led by Joe Moore, (manager of "Reclaiming the Past: Juneteenth Celebration, a Network to Freedom program), researchers at CSUS are digitizing primary documents from

the nineteenth century and making them accessible through the internet (<http://digital.lib.csus.edu/curr>). The team has scoured the archives of museums, historical societies, and libraries across the state to gather these documents. To gain access to fragile documents, the team brought scanners and laptops to the facilities. As word of the project spreads, Moore hopes that individuals will come forward and share family documents that are now in basements, attics, and garages.

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National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom

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Community Pride

In the early morning of May 21, 1855 a small party of freedom seekers and their guides crossed the Mississippi River at St. Louis, attempting to reach safety in Illinois. With them was Mary Meachum, a free woman of color and the widow of a prominent African American clergyman.

The group was apprehended and, since the enslaved people belonged to the prominent St. Louisan Henry Shaw, a detailed story of the escape was covered in local newspapers. Thus was preserved for posterity a rare example, with exact location, of an Underground Railroad event in Missouri. In December 2001, the

Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing was dedicated as part of the Network to Freedom.

A community-based project, funded in part by a Network to Freedom grant, is now underway to determine the best design for development of this historic site, which will support tourism and provide a spot for quiet contemplation. A core group of 20 has been meeting monthly on the project. Two meetings held at area schools to seek public input



Children at the community meetings create their own designs.

have each drawn over 100 people. A conceptual design is expected in May. The design will likely incorporate some form of river crossing, landscaping, and lighting to mark the path across the river. Organizers are talking with Illinois officials about marking and preserving the site on both sides of the Mississippi.