



Network to Freedom



March 2003

Revealing the Facts:

Practical Advice on Interpreting Myths at Your Historic Site

By John Beck

In my beloved Savannah, Georgia, the Pirates' House restaurant has opened its doors to satisfied patrons for over two generations. Two centuries earlier, the "house" was an inn and its customers were the captains and crews from the ships moored at the River Street docks nearby. Given these ingredients today, the place serves up some wonderful stories, in addition to unforgettable desserts. One story is about a tunnel from the Captain's Room to the Savannah River. No one is really quite sure about the tunnel - the steps to the basement are there - but everyone knows that unscrupulous sea captains kidnapped countless numbers of drunken sailors and smuggled them through it to ships embarking on the evening's ebb tide. Stand in the Captain's Room, as every visitor will sooner or later, and you can just imagine waking up at sea and wondering if you will ever see home again. Kidnapping. Smuggling. Did it really happen? We're not sure. So it goes at the Pirates' House where myth,

legend, and fact join in a dance we call history. As interpreters of historic sites and themes associated with the Underground Railroad, we face this dance every day. Driven by myth, legend, and truth, the powerful stories that shape our culture and identity present us with both challenges and opportunities. How can we respond effectively when visitors expect to see the mythical places - the tunnel, the hiding place, the secret room, the hidden staircase - or hear the fictitious stories? How can we best deal with fact and fiction? Here are four strategies that will help:

1. Know your site's stories, both real and imagined. To do so will require research and thorough knowledge of your site's themes and information sources. Keep in mind that your visitor's impression could be as old as the film they watched last night. In other words, you need

to be aware of current popular culture and its impact as well as "the facts." If you can see your site from several points of view, you will be prepared to make a polished response to most any question, and build credibility with the whole audience.

2. Always remember that meanings are in people. Every person comes to your site with expectations and truths based on a set of unique personal experiences. As an interpreter, it's your job to start where your guests are, create an environment for active learning, and take them to a higher level of understanding. Let them enjoy their story, then lead them to appreciate the evidence and perhaps reach another conclusion.

3. Never destroy a myth directly. Myths are important to cultural identity. The key is recognizing the myth from the reality - Santa Claus from Saint Nicholas. If you choose to crush a myth, you establish a superior attitude, risk alienating your guests, most certainly deflate their expectations,

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Researching the Legends of People, Incidents, Sites and Routes of the Underground Railroad

by Oloye Adeyemon

I feel fortunate to have been able to serve as the Midwest Regional Underground Railroad Coordinator during the time when the first applications to the Network to Freedom were received. My only regret is that I was unable to respond to the many requests from Underground Railroad researchers for individualized assistance. Often what distinguished successful applications from unsuccessful ones had less to do with the accuracy of the claims made than it did with the use of ineffective research methodology or a lack of sufficient verification. Even many successful applications could have done a better job of presenting their evidence since they set an example for future applicants.

The Basis of the Claim

In some cases, the claim of Underground Railroad activity in or around a residence is verifiable but not the myth of a once-upon-a-time tunnel. Time would usually be better spent unraveling the identities and activities of freedom

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“Where Did They Hide?” Practical Advice for Interpretation

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and dissolve the opportunity for learning. This doesn't mean you can't address the myth straight on in your talk. In fact, introducing your presentation by discussing the myth will grab your guests' attention from the start. Use that attentiveness to guide them to more appropriate conclusions.

4. Make your fact-based presentation as exciting as the myth. For starters, think about the best interpretive presentation you have ever experienced. Most likely, it appealed to you on a personal

level, tugged at your emotions, engaged your intellect, allowed you to participate, and probably changed a belief or behavior. And, by definition, it was fact-based. With some preparation and personal experience you, too, can create those memorable interpretive experiences for your visitors. It is a matter of blending the facts with your personal bag of interpretive tricks and techniques, and practicing the craft before an audience.

As for resolving our question at the Pirates' House, it is an easy choice. The pirates are there in the soft shadows cast

from the hearth, in the rowdy laughter of present-day diners, in the aromas drifting from the kitchen. It is an exciting illusion. The reality comes in choosing from a dessert cart groaning with any number of wonderful creations, all begging for your attention. In combination, the myths and realities of the Pirates' House make for a memorable experience. The recipe at your Underground Railroad site is certainly different, but the satisfaction on the part of your guests can be the same, if you fol-

How can we respond effectively when visitors expect to see the mythical places—the tunnel, the hiding place, the secret room...

Researching the Legends of the Underground Railroad

seekers and conductors associated with a site, than trying to substantiate an assumption that the freedom seekers assisted by a homeowner must have been hidden in the crawl space of the attic. It is important to remember that if it can be substantiated that an individual was in fact a freedom seeker or a conductor, their home or gravesite qualifies for the network whether or not anyone was ever hidden there.

Researching Underground Railroad Legends

Step 1:

Through genealogical research Underground Railroad legends can be analyzed from a number of angles including:

- How likely is it that the legend was an eyewitness account, based on the identity of the progenitor?
- Do others in the family/

community of the legendary character corroborate the legend?

- Is the legend known by any of the descendants of those who claimed to be eyewitnesses?
- How consistent are the versions of the legend collected from various sources?

Step 2:

- If the legend is about a person, the next stage of the research might focus on family history.
- If the legend is about an incident, the next stage of the research might focus on local history.
- If the legend is about a site, the next stage of the research might focus on land records and archaeology.
- If the legend is about an artifact, the next stage of

the research might focus on family heritage.

- If the legend is about a route, the next stage of the research might focus on geography.

Step 3:

- Evaluate the data to determine if the legend has been substantiated as Family/Public History.
- Evaluate the impact of the legend as an oral tradition regardless of whether it has been proven or not.

This strategy's effectiveness in researching the Underground Railroad legend over other methods lies in its multidisciplinary approach that includes the preliminary use of genealogical methodology. If one were to start by search-

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Listings Accepted in Round Four of the Network to Freedom

Sites

State	Name	City
Delaware	The Rocks- Fort Christina State Park	Wilmington
	Thomas Garrett Home Site	Wilmington
Kansas	Captain William Mitchell Homestead	Wamego
	Dr. John Doy home site (archeological ruins)	Lawrence
	Henry and Ann Harvey Farmstead	Harveyville
	Wabaunsee Cemetery	Wabaunsee County
Maryland	Sotterley Plantation	Hollywood
Missouri	Old Courthouse/Jefferson National Expansion Memorial	St. Louis
New York	First Baptist Church of Elmira	Elmira
North Carolina	Roanoke Island Freedman's Colony (Fort Raleigh NHS)	Manteo
Ohio	Boyhood Home of Dr. William E. Thompson	Bethel
	Burial Site of U.S. Senator Thomas Morris	Bethel
	Clermont County Courthouse	Batavia
	Marcus Sims—Charles Huber Tannery	Williamsburg
	Office of the Philanthropist Newspaper	New Richmond
	Robert E. Fee Burial Site	Moscow
Pennsylvania	The Johnson House	Philadelphia
Virginia	Bruin's Slave Jail	Alexandria
	Gadsby's Tavern	Alexandria

Programs

State	Name	City
Delaware	The Long Road to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in Delaware	Wilmington
Michigan	"Flight to Freedom" at Historic First Congregational Church of Detroit	Detroit

State	Name	City
Delaware	Historical Society of Delaware	Wilmington
Florida	Southeast Archeological Center (SEAC)	Tallahassee
Virginia	Thomas Balch Library	Leesburg

Facilities

Researching the Legends of the Underground Railroad (cont)

ing through local records rather than analyzing family data, it would be more difficult, if not impossible, to trace:

- freedom seekers through public records before 1870.
- the interstate, and in some cases, international movement of illegal contraband through a network of people and places that were veiled in secrecy.

Outcome

Through this approach it is possible to not only identify the participants in the Underground Railroad story, but also to show that family and community values motivated many Underground Railroad stakeholders to act in ways that were extraordinary for their times and exemplary for ours.

Candidates for Round Five of the Network to Freedom

Facilities

Florida	Family Heritage Museum	Bradenton
Maryland	Southern Maryland Studies Center	La Plata

Programs

DC	Night Sky to Freedom	Washington
Florida	Harriet Tubman & The Underground Railroad	Bradenton
Indiana	Department of Natural Resources, Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology, Underground Railroad Initiative	Indianapolis
Michigan	International Underground Railroad Heritage Program	Detroit
Nebraska	Differentiated Instruction, Mayhew Cabin Field Trip Unit	Nebraska City

Sites

DC	Mary Ann Shadd Cary House	Washington
Delaware	Friends Meetinghouse & Cemetery	Wilmington
Delaware	Tubman Garrett Riverfront Park and Market Street Bridge	Wilmington
Maryland	Camp Stanton, USCT	Benedict
Maryland	Catoctin Iron Furnace and Manor House Ruins	Thurmont
Nebraska	Mayhew Cabin	Nebraska City
Ohio	Lathrop House	Sylvania
Virginia	Oatlands Plantation	Leesburg
Wisconsin	Joshua Glover Marker, Monument Square	Racine

Network to Freedom Web Site Upgraded

January 1, 2003 marked the 140th anniversary of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Coinciding with this anniversary, NPS unveiled its updated Network to Freedom web site. The site serves as the national aggregator of local, regional, and national historical information on the Underground Railroad. New York-based College Central Network – with extensive professional expertise in incorporating technology into educational environments – created the Web site, provided seed funding, and now powers and maintains it.

“We welcomed the opportunity to work with the National Park Service in collecting, organizing, and preserving additional pieces of this story from across the country, and then broadly disseminating the evolving base of information,” says Mark Mancini, president of College Central, the nation's leading application service provider of Web-based career office management systems to small, mid-sized, and community colleges.

“The Underground Railroad is an inspiring chapter in America's history, and it's a privilege for College Central Network to be able to help preserve its memory.”

The web site (www.cr.nps.gov/ugrr) serves as the central online location for NPS efforts to coordinate preservation and educational efforts related to the Underground Railroad. In addition, it is a venue for verification of buildings and other facilities, offering visitors a wealth of background information. Via a comprehensive online submission system, participants from around the United States can submit information and photographs online, which are gathered and reviewed by their respective NPS regional coordinators. The information then is carefully woven into the overall historical fabric of what will become one of the largest collections ever of information regarding the Underground Railroad movement in the United States.

Ohio Friends of Freedom Society Recognized by Forest Service

The Friends of Freedom Society (FOFS) has been awarded the Chief's Volunteers Program Award from the US Forest Service. This award honors FOFS contributions to the development of the Wayne National Forest's Underground Railroad Preservation Initiative which included developing research goals and a management plan. Their involvement has increased public awareness of the Forest Service mission and enhanced the image of the agency, allowing it to reach under-served publics. This award was presented at the 7th Annual Ohio Underground Railroad Summit's awards banquet in October

National Underground Railroad Family Reunion Festival

The National Underground Railroad Family Reunion Festival, (<http://undergroundrrfamfest.tripod.com/>), sponsored by the William Still Underground Railroad Foundation, Inc. represents a unique opportunity to bring together descendants of UGRR participants. The Network to Freedom Program is requesting descendants to share their family stories with the public through oral history interviews to be conducted at Fam Fest in Philadelphia on June 27-28, 2003. These stories, passed down through families and communities over generations, will help people to learn more about this complex history.

The NPS is the lead agency for planning and conducting interviews at Fam Fest. A limited number of interviews will be conducted with pre-screened individuals. Interviewees must agree to let the information be made available to the public. To inquire about interviews, or for further information, please contact Guy Washington at: NPS, 1111 Jackson Street, Suite 700, Oakland, CA 94607; guy_washington@nps.gov or 510-817-1390.

Please share this information with others in order that the breath and scope of this complex theme in American history are adequately represented in the interview program.

NPS Programs Interpreting the Underground Railroad

NPS is proud of the creative educational and interpretive programs on the Underground Railroad, developed by national parks across the country. In addition to some of the national park interpretive programs that have been already included in the Network to Freedom, other NPS staff are finding ways to uncover and tell this "untold story." Chuck Arning of the John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission (MA) wrote, directed, and hosted several relevant shows in his successful cable series, "Along the Blackstone." Rock Creek Park (DC) is the only park unit with a planetarium; upon request or during February, "Night Sky to Freedom" focuses on how

bondspeople navigated to freedom. The park estimates that 10,000 people attended this program over the past five years. At Fort Donelson National Battlefield (TN), a site included in the Network to Freedom, ranger Susan Hawkins has worked to expand the Civil War park's interpretive themes to include the plight of enslaved people seeking freedom at the fort. A grant from Eastern National Parks and Monuments paid for a research trip to the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C., yielding evidence of the existence of freedmen's camps and the recruitment of African American troops. All three programs are examples of telling hitherto untold stories and of the commitment of National Park Service interpreters to keeping alive the history of the Underground Railroad.

Georgetown College Receives \$25,000 for Underground Railroad Institute

The Kentucky African American Heritage Commission (KAAHC) awarded Georgetown College Kentucky Underground Railroad Research Institute a \$25,000 grant to further the research of Underground Railroad sites. In addition, the grant award will allow Georgetown to purchase books and items for special collections for the Ensor Learning Center as well as create and maintain an Institute webpage. The Institute is a partner of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program.

In addition, Alicestyne Turley-Adams, Director of the Institute, has recently hired a new intern, Shemeka Lynn Gill. Contact the Institute at (502)863-7073 or at Alicestyne_Adams@georgetowncollege.edu

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NATIONAL
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NETWORK TO FREEDOM

Announcements

Freedom in the Florida Territory: American and Caribbean Connections to the Underground Railroad: A regional conference will be held at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida on May 29-31-2003. Topics will include various forms of marronage, known in the United States as the Underground Railroad. Contact Tamara Williams at 513-412-6648.

The NPS team for the Harriet Tubman Special Resource Study is pleased to announce its new website: www.HarrietTubmanStudy.org which provides information about Harriet Tubman and progress on the study. Visitors are also able to submit information or sign up for the project mailing list.

The Network to Freedom coordinators extend our condolences to the family and

friends of Jim Caccamo, Eastern regional coordinator of the Ohio Underground Railroad Association, who died suddenly on November 9, 2002. We know that his knowledge, enthusiasm, and passion for history is sorely missed.

Southeast Regional Coordinator Barbara Tagger received the William C. Everhart Award, for sustained achievements in interpretation that have illuminated, created insights to, and fostered appreciation of cultural and natural heritage. The award was presented on October 28, 2002 by Clemson University. Clemson also honored NPS Director Fran Maniella with this award.

Upcoming Events:

April 11-13, MORARE conference, St. Louis (314-865-0708 or 800-490-3773)

April 26, International meeting of Michigan and Ontario Underground Railroad heritage organizations, Detroit (313-872-8050)

June 7, Wisconsin Underground Railroad Network to Freedom gathering, Racine (262-636-3926 or 608-868-7772)

June 20, Indiana Freedom Trails Teachers workshop (317-232-1646)

June 19-21 UGRR lectures, BrandIt! Inc Juneteenth Program, Atlanta, Georgia (404-562-3108, x 518)

August 16, Indiana Freedom Trails Summit, Vincennes, Indiana (317-232-1646)

September 23-28 ASALH conference Milwaukee (www.asalh.com/convention.htm)

October 16-17, Midwest Regional Underground Railroad Symposium, Chillicothe, Ohio (402-221-3413)

October 17-19, Ohio Friends of Freedom Society Summit, Chillicothe, Ohio (www.ohioundergroundrailroad.org)