

# UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

Winter 1993, No. 2

National Park Service/Denver Service Center

## BRINGING YOU UP TO DATE

Those of you who have been following the progress of the Underground Railroad special resource study know that in November 1990 Congress passed Public Law 101-628, directing the secretary of the interior to submit a report on methods of preserving, interpreting, and commemorating the Underground Railroad and its routes and operations. A National Park Service (NPS) interdisciplinary team is conducting the study with the assistance of a nine-member advisory committee established by Congress.



Three meetings have been held between the NPS study team and the Underground Railroad Advisory Committee. At the first meeting in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in March 1993, the study team and committee members came together to get acquainted and to share information, goals, ideas, and expectations. Preliminary concepts for preserving, interpreting, and commemorating the Underground Railroad story were also discussed. In May 1993 the first newsletter on the Underground Railroad study was produced. It provided details on the legislative requirements of the study, stated the intent of the study (what it will and will not do), introduced the members of the advisory committee, and solicited comments and suggestions from the public.

At the second meeting in Buffalo, New York, in July 1993, the National Park Service made presentations on the progress being made on the national historic landmark theme study and the interpretive themes being developed for the special resource study. There was also a discussion on the National Trails System Act. The advisory committee commented on the preliminary concepts and worked with the NPS study team in developing these concepts. And at the third meeting in Baltimore, Maryland, in October 1993, the NPS study team reported on the progress of the study. The advisory committee was asked to review and comment on this second newsletter, and their comments have been incorporated.

### Underground Railroad Advisory Committee

Mr. Charles Blockson, Chair  
Ms. Barbara A. Hudson, Vice Chair  
Ms. Rose Powhatan, Secretary  
Ms. Vivian Abdur-Rahim  
Dr. Thomas Battle  
Dr. Ancella Bickley  
Dr. John Fleming  
Ms. Glennette Tilley-Turner  
Dr. Robin Winks

The National Park Service began collecting data in 1992, and this effort continues, for the purpose of identifying sites, structures, trails, and landscapes associated with the Underground Railroad. Some of these resources may have high potential for interpretive or protective measures, listing as a national historic landmark, or becoming a unit of the national park system.

A brochure entitled "Taking the Train to Freedom" was produced in 1992, which included an overview of the Underground Railroad story and the NPS study process, and a chronology of Underground Railroad events. Then in October 1992, the National Park Service conducted a workshop in Kansas City, Missouri, to help get the Underground Railroad study underway.

## DRAFT CONCEPTS PREPARED FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

In this second newsletter on the Underground Railroad study, we want to share with you the concepts developed by

the NPS study team in consultation with the advisory committee. It is important to note that these are **draft** concepts. At this stage of the study, we are seeking your reaction to these concepts – what you like and dislike about each one. Your comments will help us refine the range of concepts. After public comments are received and analyzed, the study will be completed and forwarded by the secretary of the interior to Congress. A subsequent newsletter will summarize public comments on the draft concepts.

The study submitted to Congress will provide encouragement for a variety of actions by all levels of government and the private sector to help protect and interpret Underground Railroad resources. While some of the ideas can be implemented immediately, any major commitment for continued or expanded initiatives by the National Park Service will require congressional action to adopt new legislation and appropriate funds. If a legislative proposal is developed, additional opportunities for public input will probably be available in public hearings before Congress.

## **STATUS AND SCHEDULE**

This year a determination will be made of the sites and structures that appear to be nationally significant. The draft special resource study will be written by spring 1994 and reviewed by the National Park Service and the Underground Railroad Advisory Committee. The revised report will be transmitted to Congress, who may then hold public hearings, implement one or more of the concepts, create a new action, or take no action.

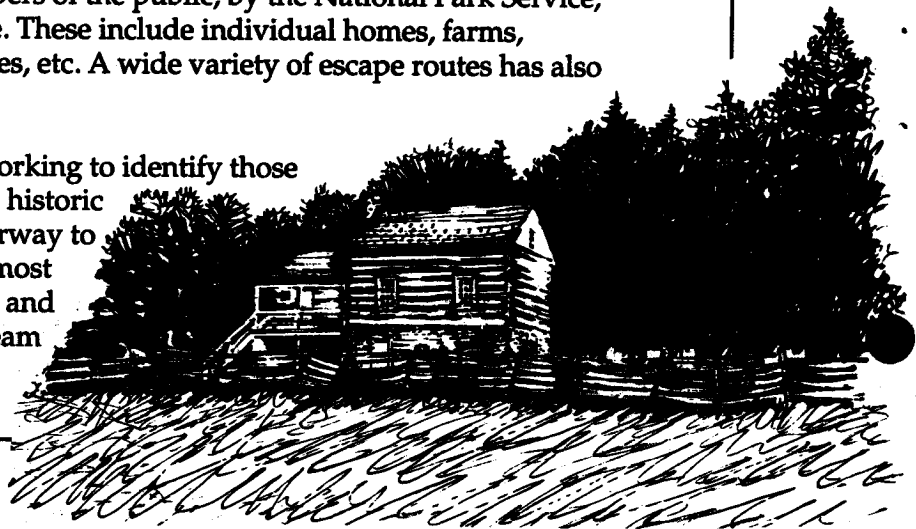
## **YOUR COMMENTS ARE IMPORTANT**

We want you involved in the study process. Your input is important as we work toward a final report to Congress. Please read the draft concepts and return your comments on the attached response form. Written comments should be returned by February 28, 1994.

### **WHAT ABOUT SITES AND STRUCTURES?**

Determining which historic Underground Railroad sites, structures, and routes are the most important to the nation is a difficult task. Because the Underground Railroad was primarily a secretive and illegal movement, documentation is sketchy, and opinions on sites, structures, and routes vary. More than 400 sites and structures in the United States and its territories have been suggested as potentially important by members of the public, by the National Park Service, and by the advisory committee. These include individual homes, farms, communities, military structures, etc. A wide variety of escape routes has also been suggested for study.

The National Park Service is working to identify those structures and sites. A national historic landmark theme study is underway to aid in the identification of the most significant sites and structures, and efforts continue by the study team to identify other resources.



## THE CONCEPTS

To date, six draft concepts have been developed to accomplish the intent of Public Law 101-628. Although intended to describe a range of reasonable approaches to preserving, interpreting, and commemorating the Underground Railroad story, the concepts are not mutually exclusive. Congress can mix and match elements of any of the concepts in any future legislation.

It should be noted that prior to implementation of any of these concepts additional research may be required to confirm the significance of Underground Railroad sites. Also a number of sites and routes are known only through folk traditions. Ethnographic research will be required to fully identify the significance of these resources.

### **Concept A: Establish a Commemorative, Interpretive, and Research Center**

*At a newly established commemorative, interpretive, and research center, visitors would come to understand the whole story of the Underground Railroad and its significance in their area or region and in United States history. Resources related to the Underground Railroad would be fully inventoried and documented.*

**Visitor Experience and Interpretation –** Under concept A, visitors would learn about the Underground Railroad through a variety of interpretive and commemorative activities, e.g., programs, exhibits (both at the center and traveling), publications, audiovisual materials, educational materials, and cultural events. The center would promote an archeological and historical research program to inventory, document, and study Underground Railroad resources. Space would be provided in the center for primary and secondary research materials, artifacts, and archives (written, musical, and oral). Also, the center would provide materials for those doing academic research, publish

materials on the Underground Railroad story, and prepare educational materials for an Underground Railroad curriculum, which could be taught in schools.

**Preservation of Resources –** Existing sites associated with the Underground Railroad story would not receive any additional protection. However, visitors would have access to information on Underground Railroad sites that are open to the public. This may increase visitation, as well as public awareness and appreciation of some sites, resulting in added revenue for resource protection.

**Development –** A commemorative, interpretive, and research center could be developed either through new construction or adaptive use of an existing historic structure associated with the Underground Railroad. Possible requirements for the center include the following: site location near transportation systems (e.g., airlines, trains, buses, automobiles), proximity to major American historical research centers, and convenience to sites associated with the Underground Railroad. This center would be comparable to a presidential library.

**Management Option –** The center could be managed in partnership between the National Park Service and an existing research entity.

### **Concept B: Enhance Interpretation and Preservation of Multiple Sites Associated with the Underground Railroad Story**

*An appreciation of the Underground Railroad would be accomplished by improving existing interpretive programs and by starting new programs that provide visitors with a complete, in-depth understanding of the Underground Railroad while focusing on local aspects of the story of the site.*

**Visitor Experience and Interpretation –** Visitors to the sites selected under this concept would have access to a variety of experiences that provide interpretation of the regional, national, and international aspects of the Underground Railroad system and how a particular site ties into those aspects through performances, exhibits, artifacts, literature, etc. Interpretation should be tied to the site, yet be flexible enough to envision the site as a part of the entire Underground Railroad story.

At existing national park system units such as Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, the National Park Service would develop programs for visitor experience based on its policies and the needs of the public. Managers of privately owned Underground Railroad sites would continue to develop their own programs.

**Preservation of Resources –** The National Park Service would continue to manage its properties. Those sites that are designated as national historic landmarks would be eligible for technical assistance under this program.

**Development –** Some development could be undertaken at existing NPS sites to provide additional interpretive needs and preserve resources associated with the Underground Railroad story. This development may range from use of existing facilities to construction of new buildings.

**Management Option –** The NPS role under this concept would be to enhance interpretation and preservation of Underground Railroad resources at NPS-owned sites as well as other sites. However, congressional legislation would be required to authorize the National Park Service to undertake a program of funding interpretation and preservation at non-NPS Underground Railroad sites. The office that administers this program would develop criteria for grant applications and administer the grant program. Individual units in the national park system could assist in this program by providing applications of

prospective sites and making a preliminary screening of the applicants prior to submitting them to the administering office.

### **Concept C: Establish National Park System Project Area/Unit**

*Visitors would have an opportunity to encounter a concentration of Underground Railroad resources over a large geographic area (up to several hundred miles). These areas could include national historic landmarks and existing NPS units associated with the Underground Railroad story, documented escape routes used by enslaved Americans, structures and sites associated with personalities and aspects of the Underground Railroad story, various landscapes significant to the Underground Railroad story, and opportunities to illustrate the international connection to the Underground Railroad.*

**Visitor Experience and Interpretation –** Visitors to the project area would gain an understanding of how the journey to freedom on the Underground Railroad might have occurred for those who were enslaved. Physical structures such as conductor's homes and hiding places could be toured. Landscape features such as swamps, rivers, forests, and caves could be interpreted and visited via trails similar or identical to ones taken by persons seeking freedom.

**Preservation of Resources –** Within the project area the National Park Service would provide technical assistance and grants for the preservation of resources associated with the Underground Railroad story, actively seek partnerships for resource preservation, and serve as a clearinghouse for individuals and organizations seeking resource preservation information.

**Development –** Concept C would be similar to existing national heritage corridors where NPS ownership and facility development are limited. Wayside interpretive markers and signs or displays in existing facilities could be used. Trails also

could be developed to connect Underground Railroad sites and structures. Existing trails and roads may be used or new trail links may be developed.

**Management Option** – The National Park Service would provide funding for the project area for 10 years. A commission could be established to assist the National Park Service in coordinating and prioritizing work. At the end of this 10-year period, the administrative duties would become the responsibility of another management entity. If during the course of NPS involvement nationally significant resources associated with the Underground Railroad are identified that are feasible for NPS ownership and no other suitable management entity is found, legislation could be introduced in Congress to bring these sites into the national park system.

#### **Concept D: Establish a Commemorative Monument**

*The history, meaning, significance, and legacy of the Underground Railroad would be remembered through a single commemorative monument. This monument would honor the people who risked or lost their lives to escape the oppression of slavery and reach freedom on the Underground Railroad.*

**Visitor Experience and Interpretation** – The primary visitor experience would involve being at the monument and becoming emotionally moved by what these enslaved Americans endured. Interpretation would include a low-key personal services and publication program focused at the monument. Similar to national monuments such as the Lincoln Memorial and Vietnam War Memorial, there would be no visitor center or interpretive media. Onsite interpreters would encourage visitors to learn about slavery, how the Underground Railroad was organized, the cooperative effort involved in an escape, the form of protest inherent in an escape on the

Underground Railroad, and the universal meaning and significance of the Underground Railroad story. Visitors to the monument would be both inspired and challenged by the personal interpretive messages and by the monument itself.

**Preservation of Resources** – Under this concept there would be no funding or programming for preservation of resources associated with the Underground Railroad.

**Development** – The conceptual design of a commemorative monument, as well as the monument's location/setting, would be determined by a juried national design competition. This design competition would be supported by a joint effort of the National Park Service, the National Endowment for the Arts, and a five-member committee (one with expertise in African-American history, one with expertise in Underground Railroad history, one with expertise in the African-American community, and two from the general public).

**Management Option** – If the site selected falls within an NPS-managed area, the National Park Service would be responsible for the care and maintenance of the monument. If the area selected is not under NPS management, another management entity would be responsible for the care and maintenance of the monument.



**Concept E: Establish Underground Railroad Commemorative Trails through the National Trails System Act**

*People would have an opportunity to travel along trail systems that evoke the perilous experience encountered by those who sought freedom by escaping on the Underground Railroad. A variety of natural resources (e.g., swamps, forests, and rivers) and cultural resources (e.g., Underground Railroad stations, homes of significant individuals, and archeological sites) along the trail systems would help bring this story alive.*

**Visitor Experience and Interpretation** – The primary visitor experience would include traveling over landscapes and visiting resources associated with the Underground Railroad story. Interpretation would focus on the Underground Railroad with a trail guide developed to lead people from one site to another. Individual resources may be interpreted through guided tours, wayside exhibits, or onsite interpretation.

**Preservation of Resources** – There would be no additional protection of resources under this concept. However, the designation of national recreation trail would carry with it the recognition of being part of the national trails system.

**Development** – No extensive trail construction would be planned as this concept

would use existing trails and roads. Additional funds may be available for acquisition of small segments needed to complete trail links with resources. Currently, the District of Columbia has a Black History Recreation Trail, which contains sites associated with the Underground Railroad and could serve as one model for this effort.

**Management Option** – The secretary of the interior could enter into agreements with individual states using the authority given in the National Trails System Act as amended through Public Law 102-461, October 22, 1992. Funding to implement agreements could be provided by Congress, state and local sources, or the private sector.

**Concept F: Establish Underground Railroad Commemorative Trails through a Commission or Foundation**

*Visitors would have an opportunity to experience, through media or travel along trails, various aspects of the Underground Railroad. Similar to concept E, natural and cultural resources would help tell the story of the struggle by enslaved Americans to gain their freedom. Under this concept an Underground Railroad commission or foundation would be established to focus solely on the Underground Railroad story and generate as much publicity/promotion for it as is appropriate.*



**Visitor Experience and Interpretation –** The primary visitor experience would be to travel over landscapes and visit resources associated with the Underground Railroad story. Interpretation would focus on the Underground Railroad with media developed to direct visitors among the various sites. Individual resources may be interpreted through guided tours, wayside exhibits, or onsite interpretation. Offsite media would be developed for distribution to individuals, organizations, and government entities.

**Preservation of Resources –** Once a site or trail segment becomes officially recognized by the Underground Railroad commission/foundation, technical and preservation assistance could be offered to protect these resources. The commission or foundation could serve as a clearinghouse to provide technical and grant information concerning the preservation of Underground Railroad resources. The commission or foundation could also develop a catalog of all Underground Railroad sites and trail segments starting with the sites named in this study and extending to new research to identify additional sites and segments. If certain segments qualify as a national historic trail, national recreation trail, or heritage corridor, they might apply for such recognition and protection as appropriate.

**Development –** The Underground Railroad commission/foundation would have the authority to officially recognize participating sites and segments, coordinate with participating state governments, solicit and distribute funds, develop a copyrighted logo and signs, etc. It may wish to develop state chapters to relate to the special efforts within each state.

**Management Option –** Implementation of this concept would begin with Congress chartering an Underground Railroad commission or foundation. This entity could be set up to receive some federal funds, but could also raise its own funds. It would be independent of any one government agency, but could nonetheless seek federal financial and technical assistance.

To learn more about the study, please write:

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National Park Service - DSC-TEA  
12795 W. Alameda Parkway  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver, CO 80225-0287







## HOW TO STAY INVOLVED

Your comments are important to the completion of the study. Earlier responses have already helped in shaping the concepts. This preaddressed, postage-paid form is provided for your convenience. If you need extra space, feel free to attach additional pages. You may sign this comment form if you wish.

### **Concept A: Establish a Commemorative, Interpretive, and Research Center**

Advantages \_\_\_\_\_  
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Disadvantages \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Concept B: Enhance Interpretation and Preservation of Multiple Sites Associated with the Underground Railroad Story**

Advantages \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Disadvantages \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Concept C: Establish National Park System Project Area/Unit**

Advantages \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Disadvantages \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Concept D: Establish a Commemorative Monument**

Advantages \_\_\_\_\_  
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Disadvantages \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Concept E: Establish Underground Railroad Commemorative Trails through the National Trails System Act**

Advantages \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Disadvantages \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Concept F: Establish Underground Railroad Commemorative Trails through a Commission or Foundation**

Advantages \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Disadvantages \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Are there other concepts you would like considered? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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