

## Collaboration is the Key to Success

NCUGRHA had several successful collaborations this past spring and summer.

Our displays and DVD *Northward to Freedom* attracted many visitors to the lower level of the Clinton County Historical Association building on Museum Day, June 7th. We thought the response was universally positive until we heard that one man went upstairs and expressed his disappointment at not seeing a railroad! The term "Underground Railroad" should not be taken literally. It was a pre Civil War movement composed of people who assisted fugitive slaves in their escape to the free Northern states and Canada. It was "underground" because it was illegal and secretive; a "Railroad" because the seekers of freedom were forwarded from one safe house to another, much as a train stops at stations.

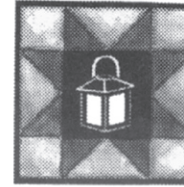
During our August 8th tour of sites in Keeseville and Peru for Adirondack Architectural Heritage, enthusiastic participants relived the drama of the Anti-Slavery crusade as they read passages from historical documents.

Our August 10th Canal Splash! event on Lake Champlain was held indoors because the replica ferry boat the *Weatherwax* needed repairs. Inside the Champlain Valley Transportation Museum, choir and acting director Heath Powell's talented troop of singers and actors shared stories of Freedom Seekers who traveled on the Champlain Line of the UGRR. NCUGHA added some stories of freedom seekers who traveled "on foot, in buggies and wagons, on boats and trains..."



Viewers of our displays on Museum Day - courtesy Maurica Gilbert.

### "Lighting Freedom's Road"



# THE NORTH COUNTRY LANTERN

*Celebrating the Importance of Freedom to the Survival of the Human Spirit*

Number 9

Summer/Fall 2008

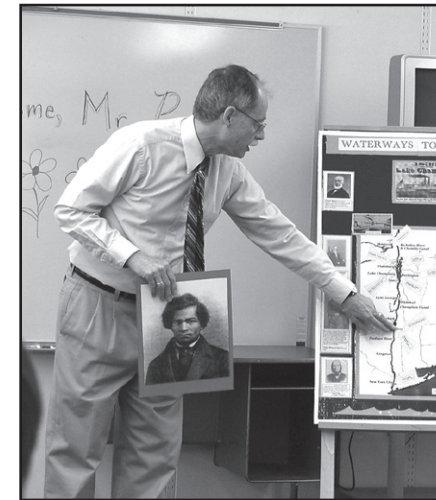
North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association  
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## Tolerance = Peace

"To share peace we must be sensitive to everyone's uniqueness and differences... We all have the same color blood and are all one big family." Those wise words were written last year by Trevor, a student in Mary Fortin's fourth grade class at the Oak Street School in Plattsburgh.

Fortin created **Journey in Chains**, a unit which covers the journey of a slave from slave ship to freedom. Her goal each year is to guide her students to an understanding that a person who practices tolerance and decency can help end social injustices. Last year, she challenged her class to write a book, "Treasures of Peace." Beginning with the phrase "To share peace we must..." each student added a word such as Change, Teach or Love, and wrote a story. Art Teacher Emily Sullivan helped them create colorful illustrations.

NCUGRHA President Don Papson visited the students and shared local stories of slavery and freedom. He included the story of Frederick Douglass who visited Middlebury, Vermont, and Keeseville, New York, in 1843. Papson also told the story of John Thomas who became an Adirondack pioneer. Thomas said he "breasted the storm" of "prejudice and opposition" in Franklin County until he was "regarded as an 'American Citizen'".



Don Papson in a classroom presentation on the Champlain Line of the UGRR - courtesy Sarah L. Cronk, Denton Publications.

The culminating event at Oak Street School was a captivating visit by re-enactor Clifford Mealy as John Thomas. A professional photographer, Mealy shared some of his work and students were "mesmerized."

Mealy and Papson also worked with eight grade students in Saranac Lake as part of an Arts in Education funded program, "Freedom Then, Freedom Now." This special program was conceived by Don's wife, Vivian, and co-ordinated by the Essex County History Museum's Educator, Lindsay Pontius. Students explored the meaning of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Four Freedoms--from Want and from Fear, and Freedoms of Speech and Worship. Because Thomas fled from slavery when his wife and children were sold to the deep South, Vivian added a fifth freedom--the Freedom to Have a Family. Thomas started a new family in New York.

The story of John Thomas had special meaning to the students in Saranac Lake--his great-great grandchildren graduated from their school. "Freedom Then, Freedom Now" included an interactive reading *From Slavery to Freedom* by the Papsons, a lecture on John Thomas, a visit by Mealy as Thomas, and a photography lesson by Mealy. Thomas was the exception: most of the pre-Civil War black Adirondack settlers did not stay. Lindsay Pontius shared that aspect of our history when she covered the story of the pre-Civil War black settlers at the Timbuctoo community in North Elba. Then she guided the students as they created Timbuctoo inspired theatrical tableaux.

The culminating event in Saranac Lake was very special. One group of students shared photographs they had taken which powerfully portrayed the pain of being rejected by others and the joy of being accepted. A second group performed scenes which dramatized the difficulties the Timbuctoo settlers faced in the beautiful, but sometimes hostile Adirondacks.

Students tell us the stories we share are "Awesome!" Last Spring, we thought the students were awesome. What they created in Plattsburgh and Saranac Lake far exceeded our expectations.

### The Spirit Says "Sing!"



Kim & Reggie Harris in Performance

Music ~ History ~ Stories

**Saturday, February 7, 2008  
4 PM**

North Country Cultural  
Center for the Arts  
30 Brinkerhoff Street  
Plattsburgh, New York

North Country  
Underground Railroad  
Historical Association  
P.O. Box 2413  
Plattsburgh, New York 12901



### Estes House Update

This past summer, NCUGRHA was awarded an Upstate History Alliance GO! grant which enabled Don Papson to attend a four day institute on "Interpreting Historic Spaces." The training will be an immense help as we develop displays for the Town of Chesterfield Visitor's Interpretive Center at Ausable Chasm.

## Canadian Historian to Speak on Da Costa in 2009

NCUGRHA has been awarded a \$1,000 mini-grant from The New York State Quadricentennial Commission to bring Parks Canada Historian A.J.B. (John) Johnston to the SUNY Plattsburgh campus next February. Johnston's visit will be co-sponsored by the Center for the Study of Canada.

On February 2nd, Johnston will present an afternoon lecture, "Mathieu Da Costa: What We Know and What We Imagine. Some Possibilities and Probabilities Surrounding a Historical Personage." Mathieu Da Costa was an interpreter of African descent who likely travelled extensively throughout the "Atlantic world" in the late 1500s and early 1600s. His services were sought by both the French and the Dutch to help them in their fur trade with aboriginal peoples. The tradition of Europeans relying on black interpreters was more than a century old by Da Costa's time. He may have sailed on many different voyages, travelling up the St. Lawrence River and all along the Atlantic coast.

According to John Johnston, "Sometimes what we do not know is even more intriguing than what we do...The story of Mathieu Da Costa... is significant for it suggests fascinating links among the peoples of Africa, Europe and the Americas during the formative era of the late 16th and early 17th centuries."

The morning after his Da Costa presentation, Johnston will present a lecture for the History Department: "The Siege of Louisbourg 1758." The French built Fortress Louisbourg to protect their New World interests. Located near the eastern tip of Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, Louisbourg was France's first line of defense during her 18th century conflict with Great Britain for colonial supremacy in North America. The capture of Louisbourg was Britain's first major victory in the French and Indian War. In his most recent book, *Endgame 1758*, Johnston weaves together the dramatic military and social history of the fortress.

Johnston is a long-time historian with Parks Canada who specializes in the history of Atlantic Canada. He is the author of 11 books and many articles, and the recipient of the Canadian Historical Association's CLIO award for *Endgame 1758*.

The times and places for Johnston's February lectures at SUNY Plattsburgh will be announced in January.

See Mathieu Da Costa "The Untold Story Part I" at <http://hk.youtube.com/watch?v=ycYGu6M3REM>

A listing of sites which relate Black Canadian history is available on the *Blacks in New France* site at <http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~gpieters/newfrance.html>



Contemporary images of Mathieu Da Costa do not exist, so artists have tried to imagine what he may have looked like.

## Summer Reunions

The Morehouse family reunion scheduled for July in Franklin County had to be cancelled due to an illness, but there were several reunions in Clinton County which connected families to their heritage.

On July 12, 2008, **Haff/Hoff** descendants gathered in the village of Peru for a graveside dedication ceremony of memorial plaques. Peru settler John Haff was a veteran of the American War of Independence, and the ceremony was led by members of the Valcour Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution. Also honored were John's son, Abraham, who served in the War of 1812 and his son, Emory, who died in the Civil War. NCUGRHA President Don Papson spoke briefly on the history of the Haff family and how it reflects the history of our nation. John Haff severely punished a young slave when he tried to escape to Vermont. But John's son, Abram, served on the Executive Committee of the Clinton County Anti-Slavery Society. And Abram's son, Emory, died in the Civil War at the Battle of Cold Harbor.

Abram's son, Nelson, had a son named Orson, who moved to Ellenburg where the spelling of the name of his branch of the family was changed to Hoff. Orson married Addie Hall, whose father, Cyrus, befriended a fugitive slave named Robert Peters after he escaped from slavery in New York. Peters lived with the Halls for many years. Addie and Orson Hoff's daughter, Pearl Eleanor, heard the story of Peters from her mother and wrote it down. She gave the story and a tintype of Peters to her grandson, Rod Bigelow.

Although it is not known if there was a connection between Robert Peters and the Haff property in Peru, his story illustrates how the anti-slavery note struck by John Haff's descendants continues to echo in our own time.



Robert Peters - courtesy Rod Bigelow

*Robert Peters  
He lived with  
Grandpa folks many  
Years died with  
Them he was a  
slave, and ran  
away. His master  
Hung him up by  
His thumbs and  
Licked him with  
apple tree limbs  
across a Barrel  
because he would  
not lick other  
slaves.*

On July 19th, a **Bigelow** family reunion was held in Plattsburgh. The Bigelow name appears frequently in Underground Railroad history. Austin Bigelow of Peru signed an anti-slavery petition, and his brother, Rensselaer, befriended black settlers who were granted land in the Adirondacks by the wealthy abolitionist, Gerrit Smith. Rev. John Flavel Bigelow gave an impassioned sermon in the Keeseville Baptist Church at the outset of the Civil War calling on all to support the North. Erastus Bigelow of Union Village (present day Greenwich) was a member of the abolitionist Free Church. Dr. I.S. Bigelow was a founder of the Washington County Anti-Slavery Society. Thaddeus B. Bigelow was the president of the Troy Anti-Slavery Society and assisted with the incorporation of the Liberty

Street Church which sheltered Freedom Seekers. Frances Edwin and Ann (Hagar) Bigelow of Concord, Massachusetts, assisted Shadrach Minkins during his escape to Montreal, Canada, from Boston in 1851. Attorney Jacob Bigelow of Washington D.C. helped 15 year old Ann Maria Weems who was disguised as a boy and spirited out of the nation's capital to Ontario. Lucius H. Bigelow was the principal UGRR agent in Burlington, Vermont.

The **Hagar** reunion was the third major family gathering this summer. Helen Allen and her cousin, Jane Babbie, organized the August event at which thirteen generations were recognized.

The Hagers are descended from Major John Addoms who was an engineer and aide to General George Washington during the American Revolution. After the war, Addoms settled with his family and slaves on Cumberland Head in Clinton County.

Addoms freed his slaves before New York ended slavery in 1827. Addoms and his second wife, Mary Townsend, had a daughter named Sarah who married Luther Hagar. Sarah's brother, John Townsend Addoms, was an abolitionist Methodist minister. He called an organizing meeting of the Plattsburgh Anti-Slavery Society in the Clinton County Court House in the spring of 1838--exactly one year to the day abolitionists had been denied use of the Court House to form a county wide society.

If we were to weave a tapestry of Clinton County's slavery and anti-slavery history, we would have to include the Addoms, Bigelows, Haffs, Hoffs, Hagers, and Robert Peters.

## A Letter to the Editor

Congratulations on the quality of The North Country Lantern...I am amazed at the level of interest in the fugitive slaves of the era of 150 years ago, and your ability to uncover and substantiate new information.

Harold Anson,  
Eugene, Oregon

I am delighted to accept.

Research has led me to realize what an honour it is to be descended from the brave, determined and strong people who chose to flee, following the North star, to relative freedom under the British crown.

The journey was fearsomely dangerous and to become re-established in a new land presented great hardship.

I accept, as you and your committee members have, the responsibility to seek every bit of knowledge that can be found, and to make this epic story part of the published history in both our countries.

Thank you - God bless:  
Larry and Evelyn Hall



The NCUGRHA Steering Committee has extended Advisory Memberships to two of our Canadian friends in Ontario. **Bud Jones** is a descendant of a family of free African Americans who moved to Montreal, Canada, where they provided refuge to fugitive slaves. Bud, who is well known for his lectures on Afro-Canadian history, lives with his wife Joyce, in Brockville.

**Larry Hall** has two ancestors who found refuge in Canada: Samuel Hall and Charles Williams. Hall crossed into Canada at the Niagara River. After the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 made Boston unsafe, Williams went to Montreal. Larry is a retired journalist who lives with his wife Evelyn in Port Hope. When informed of his nomination to Advisory Membership in NCUGRHA, Larry sent the following note of appreciation:

## In the Lantern Light

Folk singer **Lita Kelly** received a Lantern Light Award at NCUGRHA's annual meeting on June 21st. Kelly celebrates the UGRR with her original songs and stories. The Lantern Light Award is a handcrafted lantern like those abolitionists placed in the windows of their homes so that Freedom Seekers would know where they would be safe.

Photographer/Re-enactor **Clifford Oliver Mealy** was unable to attend our annual meeting. He received his Lantern at Solomon Northup Day in Saratoga Springs where he portrayed Northup.

Due to efforts of NCUGHA Board Member **Renee Moore**, Solomon Northup Day has been recognized by the National Park Service Network to Freedom Program. A Certificate of Acceptance from the National Park Service was presented to the City of Saratoga at this year's celebration.

For his 200th birthday this year, **Solomon Northup** was honored twice. Many of his descendants attended the July 20th event in Saratoga Springs. On August 16th, Northup was honored in Ft. Edward, the village where he and his wife, Anne Hampton, lived when they were first married and where he worked on the Champlain Canal and operated a lumber rafting business.



Descendants celebrate the 200th birthday of their famous ancestor, Solomon Northup, a free man who was enslaved for twelve years.

This year's celebrations were organized by The Saratoga Visitor Center's **Mary Jane Pelser**, Fort Edward Historical Association's **Paul McCarthy**, and **Marilyn Van Dyke**. Marilyn is Executive Director of the Warren County Historical Society and a member of NCUGRHA's Steering Committee.

★★★★★

Four New Yorkers are the recipients of Underground Railroad Free Press Prizes for 2008:

**Dr. David Anderson** received the award for Leadership in the Contemporary Underground Railroad Community. Dr. Anderson chairs the Rochester/Monroe County Freedom Trail Commission. He was chairman of the 2007 Frederick Douglass International Underground Railroad Conference & Freedom Festival.

**Mary Liz and Paul Stewart** were recognized for their Underground Railroad Preservation work. The Stewarts are raising funds to restore the Stephen Myers home and safe house in Albany. Myers received hundreds of Freedom Seekers forwarded to him from New York City. He sent most of them to Canada via the Erie Canal and others into the Champlain Valley.

**Tom Calarco** received the prize for the Advancement of Knowledge. Calarco is known for his groundbreaking research and publications on the history of the UGRR in eastern New York and the Adirondacks.

*Underground Railroad Free Press* subscriptions are free. To subscribe, send your email address to: publisher@urfreepress.com.

★★★★★

**Jeffrey Brace** was honored on October 12th in Poultney, Vermont, where a historical marker was dedicated in his memory. Kidnapped in West Africa at the age of 16, Brace was granted his freedom for fighting in the American Revolution. Vermont and Massachusetts descendants of Brace were present at the event. Brace lived for a time in Poultney before settling permanently in St. Albans. Interest in Brace was revived in 2004 with the publication of Dr. Kari Winter's edited version of his narrative, *The Blind African*.

## Rev. George S. Brown: Methodist Minister, Missionary and Master Stone Mason

George S. Brown was an extraordinary man. He was the first African American pastor in the Methodist Episcopal Church's Troy Conference. He became a missionary in Liberia at a time when black and white abolitionists were turning against the American Colonization Society's campaign to remove free black Americans to Africa. And, in spite of the fact that Brown was stripped of his pastoral duties due to color prejudice, he remained a steadfast Methodist.

Rev. Brown was as true to his Master as the stone walls he built in Warren County have been true to theirs--they proudly still stand. One cannot help but wonder, "Who constructed such impressive works?"

George S. Brown was born free in Rhode Island in 1801. Although his father was a Baptist Elder, he did not become a Baptist himself until he was 26 years old. With the help of his faith, George recovered from alcoholism.

When he met "holy ghost" Methodist Episcopal circuit rider William Ryder, he found his calling. In 1831, Brown was licensed to exhort (or urge) people to become Methodists; two years later, he was licensed to preach. No building was large enough in Glens Falls to hold the hundreds of people who were ready to hear him preach the word of God and be converted.

In 1836, Rev. Brown sailed for Monrovia, Liberia. He was sent there to be a teacher. He could not refrain from preaching the Gospel, and within two years, he was a Deacon and an Elder. He married the daughter of another black preacher in Liberia, only to suffer the sorrow of her illness and death. Within two years, he had remarried. He fathered a child who,



Members of Troy Conference Historical Society at the Wolcott United Methodist Church historical celebration - courtesy Rev. Pat Thompson who is at the far left.

sadly, died of whooping cough.

Missionaries to Liberia like Brown not only suffered from debilitating diseases: their lives were threatened by hostile native Africans. For Brown there were other problems: he had serious differences with John Seys, the Colonization Society's white agent, and the Methodist Episcopal Missionary Board refused to reimburse him for his expenses.

Brown was suspended from all his duties in Liberia in 1843. He sailed back to America never to see his wife again. It was years before he was able to collect the money due him. When Sandy Hill attorney Henry B. Northup filed a civil suit on his behalf, Brown was expelled from the church. Brown won his case in 1853--the same year that Northup succeeded in restoring freedom to Solomon Northup, a free man who endured twelve years of slavery.

In 1855, Brown began working in Wolcott, Vermont. In 1866, he began to preach at the Sanford's Ridge Church in Warren County. In 1886, he fell on ice and broke a bone in his thigh and never regained his health. Upon his death, Brown was buried in the Quaker Cemetery in Queensbury.

In September of 2007, the Troy Conference Historical Society placed a clergy grave marker on his grave,

and in 2008, his work at the Wolcott, Vermont, Church was recognized.

Brown wrote a journal in which he described in great detail the many trials he faced. Just as his stone walls have endured many storms and still stand, so does Rev. George S. Brown's good name.

*This article is based on the research of Rev. Pat Thompson of the Troy Conference.*

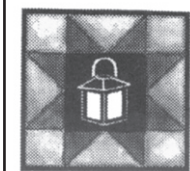
## Book Review *People of the Underground Railroad* by Tom Calarco

If history repeats itself, Tom Calarco's latest work, *People of the Underground Railroad*, will prove to be a seminal work. Calarco is the author of *The Underground Railroad in the Adirondack Region* (2004) which quickly became the starting point for UGRR researchers in Northern New York. *People of the Underground Railroad* stands to become the starting point for national UGRR researchers. Calarco's new work will have broad appeal. A biographical dictionary, it will satisfy browsers, students and in-depth researchers.

The Underground Railroad was perhaps the best example in U.S. history of black and white Americans working together for the common good, and Calarco has compiled a comprehensive encyclopedia to celebrate this national story. *People of the Underground Railroad* is a compelling, in-depth collection of stories of abolitionists who sheltered and assisted enslaved African Americans from the South as they fled to freedom in the Northern states and Canada. One hundred entries reveal the significant role these men and women played in rescuing, harboring, and conducting Freedom Seekers. Calarco has included stories of abolitionists, evangelical ministers, Quakers, philanthropists, lawyers, judges, physicians, journalists, educators, novelists, feminists, and barbers--a well as runaways who risked re-enslavement when they returned to the South to bring their friends and loved ones out of bondage.

Selections are geographically representative of the national Underground Railroad network which evolved after 1800 and continued into the early years of the Civil War. *People of the Underground Railroad* is based on authoritative information gathered from period publications, established sources and the latest research. Calarco has provided a timeline, illustrations, and a map to help the reader put the profiles into context.

**Tom Calarco** is an independent scholar specializing in the Underground Railroad. He is also the author of *The Underground Railroad Conductor* and *Abel Brown, Abolitionist*.



**The North Country  
Lantern**  
Editor, Don Papson

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