



# THE NORTH COUNTRY LANTERN

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North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association  
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## NORTHWARD TO FREEDOM PREMIERS TO PRAISE

"Great!" "Compelling" "A telling documentary" These are some of the wonderful accolades we have received for our first video production, *Northward to Freedom: Stories of the North Country Underground Railroad*.

At the October 29, 2005 premier in Plattsburgh's Stafford Middle School auditorium, very few of the 475 seats were not taken.

Before the screening a reflective mood was set for the evening by violinist Stephanie Light and members of Plattsburgh State University's Gospel Choir, under the direction of Dr. Dexter Criss. Ms. Light and the PSUC choir are featured on the video's soundtrack. Copies of the DVD were awarded to each individual who contributed to the success of the production, and all of the actors and actresses who volunteered their time and talent were introduced.

The successful premier was co-sponsored by the Red Hummingbird Foundation and the North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association. The Foundation received a \$10,000 grant through the good offices of New York State Senator Betty Little to finance the video and to create a set of associated curriculum materials. Members of our association researched, scripted, and developed the DVD with award winning videographer, Paul Frederick.

Masterfully produced by Paul, *Northward to Freedom* left the audience speechless. But Alan Stafford, owner of one of the location sites in the video—a barn where fugitive slaves were hidden during the days of the Underground Railroad—could not contain himself. He stood and enthusiastically congratulated everyone associated with the production, calling it tremendous. Still overwhelmed the next day, Alan called on his cell phone to congratulate us again! Retired journalist Ken Wibecan called to say he was amazed at how moving a 12 minute video could be.

The premier advanced our work in several significant ways. Aroused by the deteriorating condition of the Stafford barn, construction contractor Pete Conroy organized a group of volunteers, and within a week they had shored the barn's roof up to prevent it from caving in under the coming winter's heavy snows. By mid December, Steven Engelhardt, Executive Director of Adirondack Architectural Heritage, had assisted Alan Stafford in completing an application for a New York State Barns Preservation and Restoration Grant. If the grant is approved, the barn will be saved for future generations.



Chesterfield Town Supervisor (left) and Board member Russell Blaise (right) stood to the applause of the audience.

Photo by Mitchell Ray

The last parcel of the former dairy farm where the barn stands as a haunting memory of the past had been on the market. (See the Spring 2005 Lantern) After five pending sales fell through, Alan's brother, Jim, realized there was a reason: he told us he had a responsibility to protect the property and the barn. Jim canceled plans to live in the Southwest, and he and his wife are now caring for the home where he was raised.

There were other important developments after the premier: Town of Chesterfield Board Supervisor, Gerry Morrow, called to tell us his Board had decided to go forward with renovation plans for the Estes House at Ausable Chasm. Gerry expects work to begin this spring. At the Estes House, *Northward to Freedom* will introduce visitors to our first exhibit, "Onward! Your Country to Save!" which we will create in the coming months with the Essex County Historical Society.

Elise Ellick of Cleveland was so taken by *Northward to Freedom* she watched it five times. Then she called her mother (Steering Committee Member Vivian Papson) to offer her sage advice: Find a distributor! We promptly acted on Elise's suggestion, and we are pleased to announce that the Agency for Instructional Technology will soon be distributing *Northward to Freedom* nationally.

Someone at the premier asked, "What will your next production be?"

We responded, "The Isaac Johnson Story." Born a slave in Kentucky, Mr. Johnson, a master mason, settled in the North Country after the Civil War.

Now, as we build on the success of our first documentary, we have two additional video ideas. The possibilities seem endless.

NCUGRHA is retaining local distribution rights to *Northward to Freedom*, and copies can be ordered directly from us for \$16.50 (\$15 plus \$1.50 postage and handling).



Master teachers Elizabeth Luscombe (left), Marjorie Light (center) and Kate Messner (right) Photo/New York Teacher

## Why Northward to Freedom Was Created

Premier Presentation by Screenwriter Marjorie Light

Participating in this venture has been such a joy for me! I first became involved through my work on the seventh grade team here at Stafford and then, by having Don & Vivian Papson and the PSU Gospel Choir come to our school.

I teach English here at SMS and first worked with Social Studies teacher Luther Weisman, who taught me the story of Lavinia Bell, which appears in the movie. After Luther retired, my new partner, Kevin Larkin, and I added the history of the local Underground Railroad to the unit. Unfortunately, when our students conducted research using national sources, the information WE taught them was not corroborated.

Therefore, when Don asked me to join the North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association as an educator, I was eager to try to bring our rich history to classrooms in this area as well as others.

Although it took many hours to write the script, overall the process was really fairly smooth. I feel that is because I am just a conduit. A good analogy would be to look at a lantern & the way it operates. The vessel and oil are the two main components. The oil, the fuel for the lantern, represents all the people who prevailed even after being ripped from their homes, subjected to terrible cruelty, and enslaved. The outer shell of the lantern is symbolic of the people who helped in years gone by, people like Harriet Tubman & Stephen Keese Smith...and those who spread the word today, parents, teachers, and historians. I was merely the wick – a simple filament that draws forth the oil.

The most important component needed to make a lantern burn, however, is the spark. For me, that spark is my class... the children who are eager to listen to the stories of our past, both good and bad... the students who are filled with curiosity and, sometimes, righteous indignation... they are why this movie was created. This film is a way to help them understand that when things are wrong, they must be righted... when atrocities are committed, they must be halted... and **NEVER** should we forget the mistakes and the triumphs of our past.

Thank you so much for being here this evening.

## Curriculum Materials Completed by Master Teachers

After the premier of *Northward to Freedom*, Marjorie Light took on the task of writing Data Based Questions for a set of curriculum materials designed to accompany the video. Fellow Plattsburgh Middle School teacher Kate Messner reviewed the questions. The curriculum consists of a series of excerpts from North Country Underground Railroad historical documents and background information for teachers compiled by Don Papson. Each document is followed by several multiple choice questions. Students are expected to synthesize their findings in a written response to a general question. Marjorie and Kate are two of four Plattsburgh educators who have been awarded their profession's highest honor--National Board Certification. This recognition was granted after their performances had been intensely reviewed for an entire year. Marjorie and Kate each devoted 400 hours of personal time to the project.

A Seventh grade English teacher, Marjorie feels a sense of accomplishment when she sees her students discussing literature or sharing a story or poem they have written. Kate, who also teaches seventh-grade English, has always loved a challenge.

In their classrooms, Marjorie and Kate provide students with the skills they need to make a difference in the world. The *Northward to Freedom* curriculum materials they have developed will help teachers and students in many classes. Our goal is to have the DBQ Curriculum materials available by spring.



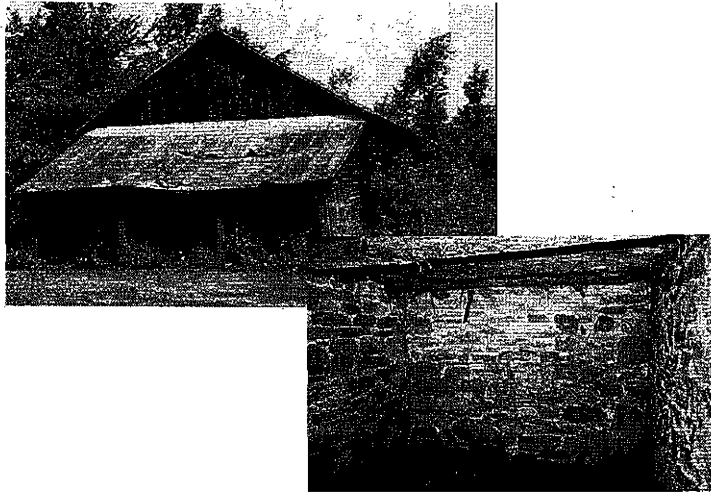
## February UGRR Conference: "Connecting Pathways to Liberty"

The Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. has The Liberty Bell as its logo. Its fifth anniversary Conference will be in Troy, New York this year from February 24-26th. "The Underground Railroad: Connecting Pathways to Liberty" will be the theme. A series of wide ranging workshops are scheduled. Rev. Fred Shaw and Vivian and Don Papson will portray the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, Sarah Parker Remond and T. B. Watson respectively in "Calls to the Struggle." To register for this important conference, log onto [www.ugrworkshop.com](http://www.ugrworkshop.com) or call (518) 432-4432.

**Historical Note:** The State House bell in Philadelphia was transformed into the Liberty Bell by abolitionists inspired by its Biblical inscription: "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All The Land Unto All The Inhabitants Thereof Lev: XXV X"

## Our Past...

### The Stephen Keese Smith barn



### History of the Haff-Smith-Stafford Property

For the past 140 years, a barn on the Haff-Smith-Stafford farm on the Union Road in Peru, New York, has been the best documented and most visited Underground Railroad site in Clinton County. But rainstorms now flood the dirt floor of the hiding place, and its thatched roof is so badly damaged, it is beginning to cave in.

As an emergency measure, the rotted roof beams were recently shored up, and a restoration grant is in process.

The Underground Railroad history of the property is well documented. In 1887, Dr. D.S. Kellogg interviewed its third owner, Quaker Stephen Keese Smith who said he "first became acquainted with the 'Under Ground Rail Road' twenty years or more" before the Civil War and that he "had large buildings and concealed the Negroes in them." Mr. Smith went on to say that he "kept them, fed them, often gave them shoes and clothing. I presume I have spent a thousand dollars for them in one way and another."

The history of the Haff-Smith-Stafford property began with slavery. The original owner, John Haff, purchased the land in 1793 and carved his farm out of the wilderness. When one of his young male slaves tried to flee across Lake Champlain to freedom in Vermont he was stopped at the Essex ferry. Haff secured the man's wrists tightly with a rope and tied the other end to his horse's saddle. The rope was so tight, it cut into the man's flesh as Haff forced the exhausted slave to walk back to the farm. This is one of the most graphic stories on record of slavery in Clinton County.

John Haff deeded a portion of his property to his son, Abram, an abolitionist Methodist minister. A founding member of the Clinton County Anti-Slavery Society when it was formed in 1837, Rev. Haff had close ties to the Quakers, and he sold the farm to Stephen Keese Smith in 1852. In 1947, the property was sold to the Stafford family which has preserved its history.

There is no other property in Clinton County with the historical significance of the Haff-Smith-Stafford farm. Its early owners were in turn, a slave owner, an abolitionist minister, and an Underground Railroad agent. The barn and its Underground Railroad hiding place are a legacy which must be saved.

## Our Future...

### Civil War Veteran Herbert Estes' home



### President's End of the Year Report

2005 was a very productive year. We presented public presentations; began a membership drive; established a Board of Trustees; adopted a Constitution and Bylaws; were recognized as a historical society by New York State; began publication of *The North Country Lantern*; entered into an agreement with the Town of Chesterfield to operate the Estes House as a visitor's center featuring our Underground Railroad exhibits; completed and began to market our first educational video, *Northward to Freedom*; joined the Upstate History Alliance; submitted a 501(c)(3) tax exempt application to the IRS (approved in January), and facilitated efforts to protect and preserve the Stafford barn in Peru, New York, where fugitive slaves were hidden.

In 2006 we will be working with the Town of Chesterfield on Estes House renovation plans, distribute curriculum materials for *Northward to Freedom*, and work closely with the Essex County Historical Society on our first exhibit. We will continue to give public presentations, investigate the creation of a website and explore new video ideas.

The following committed Board of Trustees and Steering Committee members guided our efforts in 2005: Jim Bailey, S. Booker, Robin Caudell (Secretary), Debi Craig, Steven Engelhardt, Marlene Fields, Margaret Gibbs (Vice President), Peter Kivic, Kathy Lavoie, Marjorie Light, Jackie Madison, Margaret Mary Maughan, Jack Meyers, Brendan Mills, Renee Moore, Don Papson (President), Vivian Papson, Mitchell Ray, Addie Shields, Emily Sullivan and Carol Thompson (Treasurer).

We are thankful for new memberships and donations received from Sharon Bandhold, Rod Bigelow, Clarke Casson, Lee Clark, Marvin M. Connor, Dr. Kjell Dahlen, Marlene E. Fields, Gilles M. & Mary G. Fortin, Fred Gleave, Amy M. Godine, Gayle Hartman, Margaret Maughan, Kathryn McCormick, Bob Parks, David Remington, James R. Ryan, Barbara & Rafael J. Smith, Stanley M. Smith, Arabella Trudeau, and Susan Tucker. (\$65 was designated for our first exhibit "Onward! Your Country to Save!" and \$235 toward the cost of purchasing Past Perfect software.

IT HAPPENED HERE

NEGROES  
TO BE SOLD



A Parcel of young able bodied Negro  
Men, one of whom is a Cooper by  
Trade, two Negroes Wench, and a white  
Boy Child, one of 12 Years old, and the other  
16, the latter a good Seaman, and can be  
well recommended.

From an original advertisement in New York Journal or General Advertiser, June 23, 1733

## SLAVERY IN NEW YORK

A Landmark Exhibition  
OCTOBER 7, 2005-MARCH 5, 2006

New York | Making  
Historical | History  
Society | Matter

## Slavery in New York Exhibit: A Must See

Slavery, barely mentioned in school textbooks, was key in developing New York City from its formative years as a Dutch and British colony to the early days of the United States. New Yorkers traded in slaves, distributed slaves, insured slave ships, and owned slaves. At the time of the Revolution there were more slaves in New York than in any city except Charleston, South Carolina.

The New York Historical Society is currently presenting the story of slavery in the great city of New York, a story that reveals the rich cultural legacy produced by enslaved people and honors New Yorkers--black and white--who fought to erase the "peculiar institution" from the city and state. Material from the Society's collection--ledger books of slaving voyages, ads for runaway slaves, manuscript records of New York's first abolition society and the first paintings of black New Yorkers--is supplemented by treasures from the British Library, the New York State Archives, Colonial Williamsburg, and other great repositories.

City of Plattsburgh Judge Penelope Clute visited the exhibit and found it "Very shocking how widespread" slavery was in the city. Essex County Historian and NCURGHA Vice President Margaret Gibbs, and Steering Committee Member S. Booker both found the exhibit to be excellent.

### Our Activities

The North Country Underground Historical Association researches, preserves and interprets the history of slavery, the abolition movement and the Underground Railroad along the Upper Hudson River- Champlain Canal-Lake Champlain Corridor. We provide video productions, lectures, dramatic presentations, exhibits, tours and curriculum materials to schools, community organizations and the public. Please call President, Don Papon, at 561-0277 to schedule a presentation.



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

### Order Now!

-Our moving 12minute DVD

"Northward to Freedom"

tax included.....\$15

(please add \$1.50 for postage  
& handling) Call 518-561-0277  
or Email NCUGRHA@aolcom