

**My First Look**  
by Panha Suon

*Panha Suon, a resident of the Bronx, is a student in the Educational Opportunity Program (E.O.P.) at Plattsburgh State University of New York. Panha is an Art Major. She went on an UGRR tour last summer. The barn she refers to is the barn on the old Stephen Keese Smith farm in Peru, New York.*

The Underground Railroad trip was a great experience. The things I experienced that day were unforgettable because there were many things that I learned. I have taken that knowledge and applied it to my own life. I thought I had a sense of what to expect and knew what it was all about but I was wrong. It was the opposite of what I expected.

Exploring the Underground Railroad made me feel like I was part of history. I witnessed the sites of the actual places where history took place. One place that I found engaging was the secret hiding place in the barn. I witnessed the dark dilapidated room that slaves once stayed in. This room illustrates many things and made me realize that this room had helped slaves with their freedom. It showed how hard they fought for their freedom. Another place I found interesting was John Brown's farm. I knew who Brown was from the previous studies back in high school but I had never seen his grave. John Brown was a white abolitionist who fought for slaves' rights. He fought for their freedom, and, in the end, he risked his own life. He gave slaves the confidence to revolt against their owners. He represents the road to freedom and hope for the young ones. Many people look up to him because he represents the hope and dream to a change in society.

I can honestly say that I can relate to this trip because my mother was a victim of the Kmer Rouge. She had to run away from Cambodia to Thailand by foot while carrying my older brother on her back. She escaped the oppression in her country and found hope and peace in another country. I learned that without my mother's bravery I would not be where I am right now. What I have taken from the trip and my personal life has taught me to be grateful and never to take life for granted.

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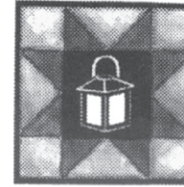
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*"Lighting Freedom's Road"*



Number 8

**THE**  
**NORTH COUNTRY**  
**LANTERN**

Winter 2007/Spring 2008

North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association  
P.O. Box 2413 - Plattsburgh, New York 12901 (518) 561-0277 - NCUGRHA@aol.com

**AND SOME WERE WOMEN**  
**A Re-Sounding Success**



*Storyteller Gwendolyn Quezaire Presutti, as Mrs. Letitia George Still, wife of the Philadelphia UGRR station master William Still. Photos by Luke T. Bush.*

Underground Railroad stories often focus on the exploits of men, but a different note was sounded last February. **AND SOME WERE WOMEN** celebrated the achievements of women. Many American women resisted slaveocracy from within. They undermined slavery by escaping from it. They sheltered, clothed and fed fugitive slaves. They sang and told stories and fed the spirit. These notes were all sounded during **AND SOME WERE WOMEN**.

A capacity audience heard spellbinding storyteller Gwendolyn Quezaire-Presutti relate the true tale of Lear Green who escaped to Philadelphia from Maryland in a box so she could be a free woman when she married her fiancé William Adams who was already free. Lear and William settled in Elmira, New York, but sadly, Lear lived only a few more years.

Adirondack folk singer Lita Kelly composed an original song for **AND SOME WERE WOMEN** to honor Mrs. Maria Haynes who was enslaved and freed in Plattsburgh. Lita's haunting refrain, "I've got peace like a river, I've got peace like a river, peace like a river in my soul!" echoed in our ears. In her capacity as Music Director for Seton Catholic schools, Lita led her choral students in a moving medley of songs of freedom.

Nancy Fink made an appearance as Quaker minister Catherine Robinson Keese who sheltered fugitive slaves in Peru, New York. Catherine was a young woman when she sounded the note for her future life with Samuel Keese, the head of the UGRR depot in the village of Peru. On July 4, 1831, she wrote, "The bells are ringing merrily around me...How nonsensical...while three times five hundred thousand slaves start at every word, as if meant to mock their woes, and shake their chains in our very midst; thinking defiance which they dare not speak."

Gwen returned to change the tone by striking everyone's funny bone with the delectable African American story "Tally-Po". She learned it from her grandfather whom she visited in the South every summer when she was a child.

This wonderful event was made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts Decentralization program administered locally by the North Country Cultural Center for the Arts.



*Seton Catholic Schools choir.*



*Folksinger Lita Kelly premieres her tribute to Maria Haynes.*

**CANAL SPLASH!**

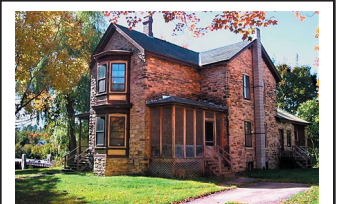
**A CELEBRATION**  
**UNDERGROUND** **OF THE**  
**RAILROAD**



**AUGUST 10**  
**2007**

Rides on the Weatherwax, a replica 1820 sail ferry. Songs and stories of fugitive slaves who traveled to freedom on the Champlain Line of the Underground Railroad. Space limited. Reserve your seat! Call Champlain Valley Transportation Museum at (518) 566-7575 for schedule.

North Country  
Underground Railroad  
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P.O. Box 2413  
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**Estes House**  
**Update**

The Town of Chesterfield Visitors Interpretive Center planned for the Estes House at Ausable Chasm continues on hold. All grants for construction work and exhibits have been extended to the end of 2010.

# Upcoming Events

## Third Annual Meeting-June 21st

Our Third Annual Meeting will be held on Saturday, June 21, 2008, from 3 to 5 pm at the Ausable Valley Grange Hall at 1749 Main Street in Keeseville.

This year's Lantern Light Awardees are Adirondack Folksinger Lita Kelly and photographer/reenactor Cliff Oliver Mealy. Ms. Kelly will reprise her original song, "OH, MARIAH, MARIA HAYNES," inspired by the life of Mrs. Maria Haynes, one of the last enslaved women manumitted in Plattsburgh. Mrs. Haynes moved to Keeseville in 1839 where she died in 1866.

Mr. Mealy has portrayed a myriad of black men from New York's history, and he keeps adding to the list. Over the years he has brought to life Solomon Northup; Washington County Fireman Len Hazzard; Frederick Douglass; Reverend Lemuel Haynes; Battle of Saratoga veteran, Salem Poor; and Adirondack Pioneer, John Thomas. He has plans to portray fugitive slave Moses Roper, and explorers Mathieu da Costa and Jan Rodriguez for the 2009 Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadracentennial.

Reports of the past year's activities will be presented, Steering Committee member Jackie Madison, our webmaster, will introduce our website, officers will be elected for the coming year, and we will have a raffle. Refreshments will be served. All are invited to attend.

## Excitement in Fort Covington

by Don Papson

*Fort Covington, April 26-27th--* Tom Derouchie was doing some excavating near his house on Covington Hill when one of the tires on his back hoe sank into a hole. Tom got really excited. He thought he had found the tunnel which everyone has said led fugitive slaves from the Salmon River to the old Jabez Parkhurst place on Covington Street. Tom told his neighbor, Chris Nye, what had happened, and Tom got excited. Chris and his wife Shannon are restoring the Parkhurst house. They know fugitive slaves were sheltered in the house before they were taken in a wagon across the border into Canada. *And* a back hoe had recently sunk into a hole in *their* yard.

Tom asked Chris to call me. I got excited because I have heard a lot of stories about UGRR tunnels, but I had never seen one.

My wife, Vivian, and I hopped in our car and I drove to Fort Covington. As soon as we got there, Chris walked us over to Tom's house. A half dozen excited adults and kids were at the mysterious hole which was full of water. A woman was taking pictures. A man was holding onto a strap connected to a sump pump. Another man was on his stomach with a flashlight. What was down there? An old well? A septic tank? The *tunnel*? I lay down and turned on my flashlight. I saw several timbers. They had supported the roof of something. But what?

Chris told Tom he should remove more earth so we could see more. Tom climbed onto his back hoe and dug up one huge scoop of earth. We heard a crack as one of the timbers broke. Chris hopped down onto another timber that was still intact. With a long stick, he poked all around the wall of the strange underground space...It was circular... It was made of stones.... it had no entrance.

Then Chris saw something -- a drain pipe coming to the hole from Tom's house. The chamber was some kind of underground storage tank. "Oh, no!" said the man who had been on his stomach looking into the hole when we arrived. "It isn't the tunnel! It's a cess pool!"

That night everyone in Fort Covington would be talking about what had happened. Chris says the guy whose back hoe sank into the hole on his place told him the village has a tunnel map. Chris is going to try get a copy in hopes that it will help him locate the tunnel which he thinks leads to a corner of his house.

Vivian said even though she hadn't seen an UGRR tunnel, she enjoyed seeing how excited everyone was.

*APN, Navigating the North Country, a new publication produced by students at Plattsburgh State University has a beautiful article on the restoration of the Parkhurst house. For a free copy, contact Professor Gretel Schueller at (518) 5645-2425 or apnprint@gmail.com.*

**"Maria Haynes: One of Plattsburgh's Last Enslaved Women."** A program with Don Papson and Lita Kelly. Refreshments following. Free and open to the public. Clinton County Historical Museum, Four Chimneys Building, 98 Ohio Avenue, Plattsburgh, NY. (518) 561-0340.

**August 8th- "Keeseville and Slavery: A Village Divided."** This tour led by Don Papson will include historic anti-slavery sites and voices from the past: fugitive slave Frederick Douglass's thoughts on slave masters when he lectured in the village in 1843; former Plattsburgh slave Ben Lewis's dying wish for a suit of clothes in which to be buried; Wendell Lansing's anti-slavery resolution which divided the Baptists; and the charge "Disunionist!" which prevented black abolitionist lecturer Charles Lennox Remond and his sister Sarah Parker Remond from being heard in Keeseville. The tour will begin at 10 a.m. The fee is \$30 for AARCH and NCUGRHA members and \$35 for non-members. For more information and to make a reservation, call AARCH at (518) 834-9328. Reservations are now being taken.



*Looking into the mysterious hole.*

## Book Review

by Vivian Papson

## Senator Henry Wilson and the Civil War

by John L. Myers.  
University Press of America  
Latham, MD  
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As we credit and honor President Abraham Lincoln for the Emancipation Proclamation it is good to remember that the Abolitionists talked about it first. Among the most memorable of these was Henry Wilson, a Congressman from Massachusetts who walked his abolition talk in the halls of the United States Senate. Dr. John Myers's new book chronicles the career of a man who saw crisis as opportunity. Reading it, I found myself marveling how a radical and revolutionary idea can become accepted and even proclaimed as the order of the day. Was it vision? Statesmanship? Wilson had both.

Everyone knew that this Senator was "uncommonly sympathetic to Blacks", yet he was widely admired and loved. A patriot who recognized that slavery and other forms of oppression of Blacks were evils that beset the nation, Wilson worked every angle that presented itself toward their abolition. He saw the importance of adding legality to moral authority, to prevent those who favored slavery to continue using the Constitution and law on their side. While serving as Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, he found ways to pursue his parallel agenda. More than anyone else it was Wilson who step by step, led Congress to separate itself from any and all forms of commerce with slavery, and to consult conscience in matters affecting Blacks, whether slave or free.

In addition to being one of the most diligent Congressmen agitating for Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, his legislative accomplishments on behalf of the oppressed included the bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia; legislation to equalize treatment of Blacks mustered into the military, including freeing their wives and children; legislation which created the Freedmen's Bureau, and the establishment of the Freedmen's Savings Bank. This is a listing of what are the most notable of his official actions while providing the nation with its greatest army to that time.

I had the opportunity to speak with historian and author Dr. John Myers about this fascinating era which stimulated such extreme expressions of personal and national conscience. Dr Myers remarked upon something so obvious yet so little spoken of: by the act of secession, the South relinquished its capacity to dominate the halls of national power. Southerners themselves opened the doors to change, and the change agents entered in. Henry Wilson was ready to lead the way.

*Dr. John L. Myers is Emeritus Professor of History at SUNY Plattsburgh and a member of the Steering Committee of the North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association.*



## Solomon Northrup 200th Birthday Commemoration

August 16th • 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Old Fort Museum

Route 3, Fort Edward, NY 12828

For more information, call 518-747-9600

Born free in Minerva, Essex Country, Solomon Northrup was raised in Washington Country. He was kidnapped in Saratoga County in 1841 and sold South. After being enslaved for twelve years, he regained his freedom and published his acclaimed narrative, *Twelve Years a Slave*. A few years later he mysteriously disappeared from the pages of history.

## In the Lantern Light

More than 250 people attended the **annual February Albany UGRR conference** sponsored by the UGRR History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. Retired political science teacher Maren Stein and NCUGRHA's President, Don Papson, were co-presenters for one workshop. They shared their research findings on how the Champlain Canal and Lake Champlain provided freedom seekers with an important road to freedom in Canada. Their presentation was well received.

**NCUGRHA Vice President, Margaret Gibbs**, has been appointed to the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial. Next year will mark the 400th anniversary of two historic events: the voyage of Henry Hudson on the River which carries his name, and the voyage of Samuel de Champlain up the lake which bears his name.

In Ferrisburgh, Vermont, the **Rokeby Museum has mounted a special exhibit**, "Nine Essential Speeches by American Abolitionists" featuring excerpts from Frederick Douglass's 1852 "What to the Negro is the Fourth of July?" speech, and excerpts from speeches by William Lloyd Garrison, Angelina Grimke, Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, and Vermont's own William Slade. In 1843, Frederick Douglass visited Rokeby, the former home of abolitionists Rowland T. and Rachel G. Robinson. He then crossed Lake Champlain to Keeseville and "stirred" the abolitionist soil of Clinton County, New York.

All who missed the **Morehouse family reunion** last year will have another opportunity to celebrate with the descendants of Adirondack pioneer John Thomas this summer. Mr. Thomas escaped from slavery in Maryland on the UGRR and settled in Franklin County, New York. His great-great grandsons, Victor and Oscar Morehouse, and their sisters, Joan and Margaret, were reunited last summer. They had not seen one another in 47 years, and they did not know the UGRR history of their family until we uncovered it in our research.

The Morehouse Reunion will take place on July 27th at the Vermontville Town Park and begin at noon. All are invited. Reenactor Cliff Oliver Mealy will return as John Thomas. Don Papson will share his research on Mr. Thomas and tell the story of Willis Augustus Hodges, the founder of Franklin County's short lived black settlement known as Blacksville. For more information, call Franklin Town Supervisor, Mary Ellen Keith at 891-2189.



## On John Brown & the UGRR in the Adirondacks

In the last issue of the *North Country Lantern*, we shared a 1924 newspaper article about Milo Durand, Phineas Norton and John Brown helping “scores” of fugitive slaves. Another document has come to light about John Brown assisting fugitive slaves in the Adirondacks. The document is Frances Mihill’s interview with Lyman Epps, Jr. whose father, Lyman Epps Sr., was a good friend of Brown. Miss Mihill was a student of folklorist Harold W. Thompson when she interviewed Lyman Epps Jr. Her original paper is in the Harold Thompson Collection at the Research Library of the New York Historical Association in Cooperstown. Thompson included her interview in his book *Body, Boots & Britches*.

Lyman Epps Jr.

Frances Mihill was the great-granddaughter of George W. Mihills (the *s* was later dropped). George W.’s brother, Uriah D., was a trusted friend of Gerrit Smith’s black land grantees. In 1848, Syracuse UGRR agent Jermaine Loguen visited the Adirondacks and reported that land grantees who planned to claim their property needed to know that “a high-handed game” was being played. Grantees were being shown undesirable lots which were not the ones allotted to them and being persuaded to sell them cheaply. One man had been “cheated out of his farm, which he never saw, for the paltry sum of twenty shillings.”<sup>1</sup> Loguen named a handful of white men the grantees could trust. One was Uriah D. Mihills of Keene.

Miss Mihill’s interview of Lyman Epps Jr. provides us with an authentic voice from the past. Lyman was so popular in Lake Placid everyone called him “Lym.” When Francis met with him he commented on how much she had grown and what a nice person her grandfather had been. Francis knew that Lym was the last person alive in North Elba from the Gerrit Smith land grant days, and she wanted to know what happened to everyone else. Lym told her many of the families who came expected to farm but hadn’t realized they would have to clear the forest first. Some just looked, turned around, and went back. After John Brown came, some made arrangements with him and found their way into Canada. Francis asked Lym specifically about the Underground Railroad, and recorded his answer:

He drawled in his north country twang, “Ye know, I don’t know where they got that name for it; all ‘twus wuz just an old Cord’roy road an’ an ox-cart. But them folks wuz different, ye know, most of them wuz slaves, but our bunch wan’t. We wuz all free families. An’ them, they wan’t even grateful to John Brown--why, I can ‘member them complainin’ of Mis’ Brown’s table she set.” I asked him if he remembered John Brown much and his eyes filled with tears as he answered “I usta sit on his knee and hear him tell about how he wuz gonna’ free the colored folk and teach ‘em how to farm up here. An’ then he went away, an’ pretty soon word come that he’d been killed and Mis’ Brown went down to git his body....ma’ whole family sung at his fun’ral.” I asked him if he could remember the song he sang and he said it was “Blow, ye the trumpet, Blow,” but he couldn’t remember it now.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Epps went on to tell Frances about the unveiling of the statue of John Brown three years before and how he had “pulled aside the curtain that covered it.” The unveiling ceremony took place on May 9, 1935, which means the interview took place in 1938.

### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> “Dr. James McCune Smith” *North Star*, 24 Mar., 1848.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Mihill, “Folk Lore of Lake Placid-Essex Co.” Harold Thompson Archives, Library, Special Collections, New York State Historical Association.

## A Letter to the Editor

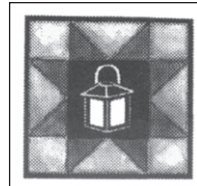
Can you please direct me to some primary source materials that describe slave escapes on a water route? Are there any articles that you can recommend?

Thank you.  
Steve Vetter  
Bradenton, FL

Dear Mr. Vetter,

Thank you for your question. Here are four sources:

- Moses Roper, *Narrative of the Adventures and Escape of Moses Roper, from American Slavery*. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/roper/menu.html>
- Elizabeth Buffum Chace, *Anti-Slavery Reminiscences*. (Central Falls, R.I.: R.L. Freeman & Son, 1891):10, Google Book Search
- Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. [http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Harriet\\_Jacobs/Incidents\\_in\\_the\\_Life\\_of\\_a\\_Slave\\_Girl/](http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Harriet_Jacobs/Incidents_in_the_Life_of_a_Slave_Girl/)
- Austin Bearse, *Reminiscences of Fugitive-slave Law Days in Old Boston*. <http://books.google.com/books?id=eYtuULUUBHYC&pg=PA1&lpg=PA1&dq=Austin+Bearse,+Reminiscences+of+Fugitive-slave+Law+Days+in+Old+Boston+&source=web&ots=NXB7I8RFLx&sig=nveBVs0wQDjtfUoUhD-lkXq9pU&hl=en>
- Our DVD, “Northward to Freedom” which includes two stories of fugitive slaves who made their way to Canada on the Champlain Line of the UGRR. (Available from us at \$18 including shipping.)



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

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President, Don Papson  
Vice President, Margaret Gibbs  
Treasurer, Carol Thompson  
Secretary, Kathy Lavoie

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Railroad Association  
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*Rouses Point Steamboat Landing and Hotel. Special Collections, Benjamin F. Feinberg Library, State University of New York at Plattsburgh*

## Rouses Point: Terminus on the Champlain Line of the UGRR

The Champlain Line of the Underground Railroad (the Upper Hudson River-Champlain Canal-Lake Champlain route) was one of New York’s most important passageways to freedom. Rouses Point, which is on Lake Champlain and just below the Canadian border, was the key terminal station on the line.

By the early 1850s, Rouses Point had a busy landing for steamboats and rail connections north to Montreal and west to Ogdensburg. Ogdensburg was at the narrowest point on the St. Lawrence River and was an entry point to Canada West (Ontario).

UGRR historian Wilbur Siebert made several references to Rouses Point in his *Vermont’s Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad Record*. According to Siebert, St. Albans Vermont businessman Lawrence Brainerd took full advantage of steamboats and railroads to send runaways into Canada: “Those sent by water were landed at St. Johns and later at Rouse’s Point, while those sent by rail were landed at Montreal. Before the railroads were built Mr. Brainerd had his passengers taken eighteen miles to Mancisco Bay, in Canada, by private conveyance”.<sup>1</sup>

Siebert identified Lucius H. Bigelow as the principal Burlington, Vermont, agent who sent runaways across Lake Champlain to Rouses Point. The importance of Rouses Point to the Champlain Line of the UGRR was confirmed in 1854 when black Free Will Baptist John W. Lewis reported to *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* that a young woman from Maryland had “passed on to Canada via St. Albans, and Rouse point.”<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Lavinia Bell also crossed into Canada at Rouses Point. She escaped from Texas in January of 1861. Her story appeared on the front pages of Montreal’s newspapers and can be found in John H. Blassingame’s *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies*.

There is ample evidence that the major terminus on the Champlain Line of the Underground Railroad was Rouses Point. However, we do not know for certain where fugitive slaves stayed in the village. According to oral histories, they were sheltered in General Ezra Thurber’s House and in Dewey’s Tavern, and in a few other homes, but no supporting documents have been found. The General Ezra Thurber home is located south of the village. A historic marker identifies it as a place “used in the Underground Railroad, 1860.” Thurber could have assisted fugitive slaves: he worked for the Customs Department. There is also a tunnel story associated with Thurber’s house.

Rouses Point historian Donna Racine believes that there is often an “element of truth” in oral histories, but she has found that there can be “a huge amount of embellishment” in them. Primary and secondary documents such as letters, diaries, journal entries, personal recollections or newspaper accounts are needed to prove that the Thurber house was a stop on the UGRR. Primary and secondary documents are also needed for the other buildings which are said to have been safe houses. Mrs. Racine has been searching for such documents, but has come up empty handed.

Rouses Point was the most important UGRR terminus on the Champlain Line of the Underground Railroad. But where is the proof of where they were sheltered?

*We encourage anyone who has or knows the whereabouts of primary or secondary documents about safe buildings on the UGRR in Rouses Point to contact us or Village Historian Donna Racine at 518-297-5502, ext. 335 or email her at [historian1933@aol.com](mailto:historian1933@aol.com).*

### (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> Wilbur H. Siebert, *Vermont’s Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad Record* (Columbus, Ohio: The Spahr and Glenn Co., 1937) Reprinted in Canada by Tony O’Connor, 87-88.

<sup>2</sup> Letter From J.W. Lewis, Pleasant Valley, Vt., Aug 8th, ‘54.” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, Aug. 25, 1854.