

You are cordially invited
to attend our
Fifth Annual Meeting
June 26, 2010
3-5pm

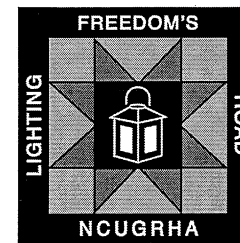
Ausable Valley Grange Hall
1749 Main Street
Keeseville, NY

- * Reports
- * Election of Trustees
- * Raffle
- * Refreshments

★★Music by★★

The Lake Champlain Mass Choir
Directed by Dr. Dexter Criss

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



THE NORTH COUNTRY LANTERN

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

Number 12

Winter 2009/Spring 2010

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

Heritage Center-Museum Construction Contract Signed



A day we first envisioned five years ago has at last arrived: the Estes House at Ausable Chasm is about to be transformed into the Town of Chesterfield Heritage Center and the North Star Underground Railroad Museum. Riznick Construction Corporation of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and Crown Point, New York, has been awarded a contract for the project. Crews are expected to start work on the historic sandstone building in mid-June and finish the job by the end of September. By the Spring of next year we will be fully operational. During a May 20th meeting of all parties involved, Architect David Whitford declared it was a "historic day."

Higher than anticipated costs forced the Town to cut the second floor renovations from the project. Options are being considered, however, on when and how that work can proceed.

From left to right, NCUGRHA officers Don Papsen and Frank Kinnelly; Architectural Intern Erin Sears; Town of Chesterfield Supervisor, Jerry Morrow; Paul Davidson and Carl Ross of Riznick Construction Corporation, and architect David Whitford of AES Northeast.

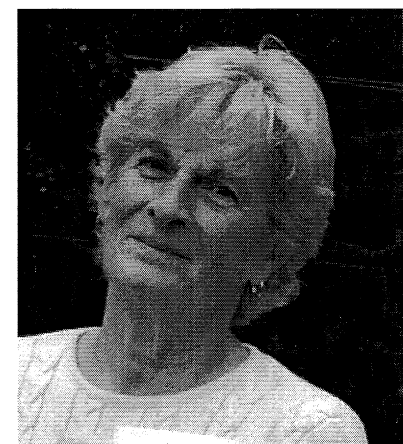
Manager & Contingency Center Fund Appeal

We have had an outstanding response to our appeal for contributions to the Center Manager & Contingency Fund. To date, a total of \$3,150 toward our \$10,000 goal has been received. Anticipating that the Heritage Center and North Star Museum would open in May, NCUGRHA's Board hired Helen Nerska as our interim part-time Manager. When the Museum project was delayed, we turned our attention to another project: the restoration of the Stephen Keese Smith barn in Peru. Helen organized History & Freedom: Herstory featuring the musical trio, Sounds of the Northway. The benefit brought in \$2,000. But work on the Heritage Center continued to be delayed and the Board could not justify keeping Helen as our employee. Fortunately, she became aware of the Senior Community Service Employment Program, a federally funded two year service which matches not-for-profits with seniors who need to learn job skills. Now, as our SCSEP Trainee, Helen is mastering several computer programs and improving our bookkeeping, publicity and educational efforts.

Helen Nerska is a perfect match for NCUGRHA. Her parents and grandparents instilled a love of history in her. She is descended from one of Clinton County's earliest permanent settlers, Major John Addoms, a Revolutionary War Aide to General George Washington. She is especially proud that the Major's son, John Townsend Addoms, was an avowed abolitionist.

After she graduated from Plattsburgh State University, Helen moved to Canada. There, during a professional career which spanned more than 30 years, she became highly skilled in project management, marketing and administration. Today, she resides in the Allen Homestead on the Jabez Allen Road in the Town of Peru. Helen is not only dedicated to NCUGRHA, she is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Clinton County Historical Association and the Anderson Falls Historical Society.

Without the Center Manager & Contingency Fund, we could not have hired Helen. As donations continue to come in for this special resource, we will set them aside for the day when we will rehire her.



SAVE THE DATE!

Solomon Northup Day

A Celebration of Freedom

July 17, 2010

Saratoga Springs

Heritage Area Visitor Center

297 Broadway

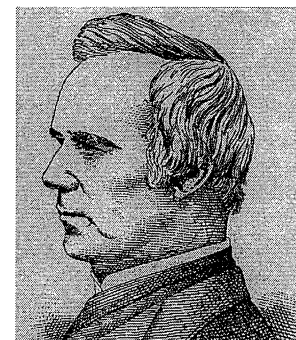
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866

**For More Information, Call:
518-587-3241 for program**

VILLAGES & CHURCHES DIVIDED

AUGUST 14, 2010

An interactive tour
of Keeseville & Peru



Rev. Andrew Witherspoon's trial
in the Keeseville Methodist Church
will be reenacted

Limited to 20 people. Register Now!
\$30 NCUGRHA members; \$40 Non-Members
Call Helen Nerska at 518-643-0938 or email
allenhomestead@gmail

Archaeological Excavations at the Stephen Keese Smith Barn

by Andrew T. Black

Andy Black is the owner of Black Drake Consulting, a private archaeology and historic preservation consulting firm. He is also a part time teacher at SUNY Plattsburgh. Volunteering his time as a member of the S.K. Smith Barn Restoration Committee, he organized Clinton County's first UGRR archaeological dig. Additional excavations are planned for the Fall.

On April 17/18, student volunteers from SUNY Plattsburgh and SUNY Potsdam helped in exploratory archaeological excavations at a barn in Peru, NY. The barn was part of the Stephen Keese Smith property in the 1850s and 60s and was likely used to hide refugees travelling on the underground railroad (along with other buildings on the property). The dig was done in advance of restoration work on the barn being organized by the North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association. It was held with the permission and help of the property owners, Frank & Jacquelyn Perusse.

The goals of the dig were threefold:

1. To find out whether there are any significant archaeological deposits along the walls of the barn that may be disturbed/destroyed by restoration work on the foundation (some of the work will be below grade).

2. To answer questions on how the barn was structurally designed.

3. To establish the original floor level in the "hidden room" of the barn and see if there are deposits directly related to the room's occupation by refugees.

Unfortunately, the last goal could not be achieved because the room was flooded. Once the groundwater level subsides, we will return to the barn to explore this goal.

I ran the dig with one of my Black Drake Consulting crew members, David McDowell. Twelve students from SUNY Plattsburgh and three from Potsdam came out to help excavate. Dr. Hadley Kruscek-Aaron, a professor from Potsdam, also came down with two other students to observe and offer advice. Members of the NCUGRHA were also there to help (specifically Helen Allen Nerska and Frank Perusse).

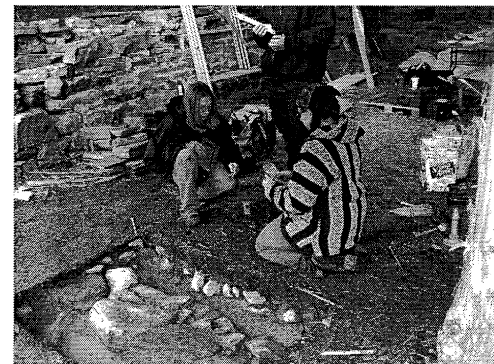
The weather was gray and cold with light rain showers off and on for both days. Despite the weather, the students remained quite enthusiastic the whole time.

Although the results may seem minimal, they did provide some important information that will directly assist in the proposed restoration work. (And for an excavation lasting only two days, the results were quite good.) We answered some of the structural questions we had, and we established that the soils along the outside of the foundations are free of any significant deposits that may require a lot of archaeological work to be done before restoration can begin. Sometimes negative results are a good thing.



Group photo at conclusion of two day dig. Andy Black is in boots, front row center; Barn Restoration Committee Chairperson, Glenn Erb, to his left. Photos by Helen Allen.

Students established the original floor level and showed that the floor was of packed earth (as opposed to floorboards). They uncovered a horseshoe, evidence that the barn was used to house work animals.



Evidence was found of a full foundation under the north wall (as opposed to just set-stones).

Items unearthed outside near the barn's foundation included structural material such as nails, hardware, window glass, and a small 20th century rubbish scatter. Restoration work will not destroy archaeologically significant remains.



Anti-Slavery Panel Dedicated



Assistant Church Historian Phyllis Wells. Photo by Luke T. Bush.

On the chilly evening of February 17th, thirty-five members of NCUGRHA and the First Presbyterian Church of Plattsburgh gathered in front of Plattsburgh's First Presbyterian church to unveil the city's first interpretive panel to commemorate the Anti-Slavery movement. The distinctive panel is one of a series of state funded markers on New York's Underground Railroad Heritage Trail. The North Country has three others – at the John Brown Farm in North Elba; the Essex County Courthouse and the First Congregational Church in Malone.

The mistress of ceremonies for the Plattsburgh dedication was Anne Bailey who chaired the church committee which finalized the wording for the marker. Interim Pastor Virginia Murray offered a special prayer in which she gave "thanks for those who made freedom a gift for all regardless of race, ethnicity or color." Assistant Church historian Phyllis Wells expressed gratitude for the recovery of a lost chapter in the church's history. Clinton County Historian Anastasia Pratt linked the panel to images of fugitives from slavery on an outdoor tile mural local students created for the County Building during 2009's Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial.

NCUGRHA President/Historian Don Papson shared his findings. First Presbyterian Church played a pivotal role in the early stages of the county's anti slavery movement. It was a moment of change in the fall of 1837 when the Clinton County Anti-Slavery Society convened for its first annual meeting in the original church constructed on the site.

Following The Leads

By Don Papson

Many leads come our way to sites which may have been stops on the underground railroad. We hit pay dirt with some. Others don't pan out.

Recently, we broke the bank with the help of Plattsburgh Public Library Director **Stan Ransom** and Reference Librarian, **Sharon Bandhold**. (Stan and Sharon are both members of NCUGRHA.) With Stan's blessing, Sharon encouraged me to search through the library's local history collection.

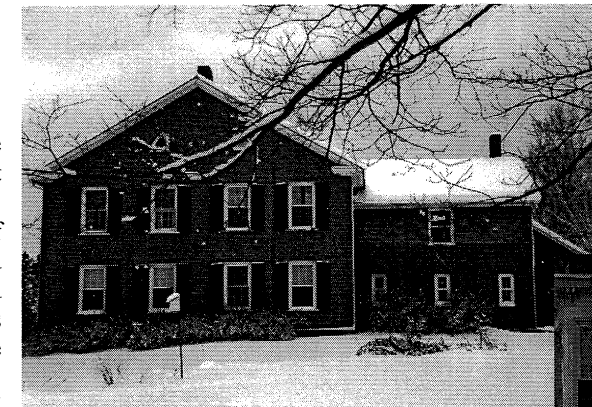
In one box I found an intriguing xeroxed copy of a genealogy newsletter-- the March 1977 *Lapham Leader*. An image on page three amazed me. The head of Peru's Underground Railroad depot, Samuel Keese, was staring at me. I had never considered that the sketch I had of him was inspired by a photograph.

Could the editor of the newsletter still be alive and have the original image? I jotted down LAPHAM LEADER, and "Kitson, Flint Michigan". That evening I located a man named Daniel Kitson in Flint. He was the son of Phyllis Kitson, the woman who had published the newsletter thirty years earlier. He told me that his mother was living in an assisted living facility and gave me her phone number. Mrs. Kitson and I began to communicate over the phone and by letter. Just before Christmas, she responded to my request for a copy of her photograph of Samuel Keese, "when I began my work in genealogical journalism back in the mid-60's I had the hope that it would survive & some day be able to provide assistance to others who had similar goals. For this reason your request is something of a 'dream come true' for me."

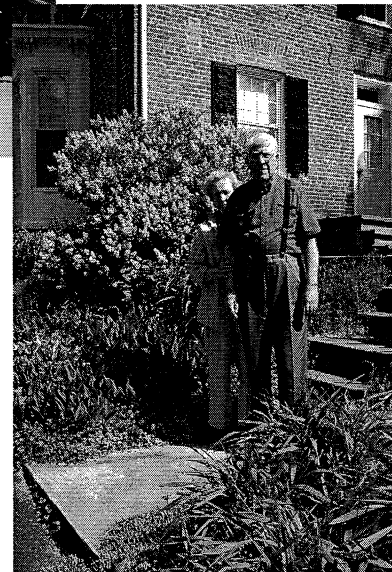
The photograph of Samuel Keese was one of the oldest in Mrs. Kitson's collection. She knew he had been her grandfather's great-great uncle, but she was not aware of his having been involved in the underground railroad. She knew Laphams had been involved. She recalled "hearing stories as a child about my great-grandmother, Ruth Keese (Lapham) Ferris (1847-1928) talking of people coming to her father's, (Sen. Nathan Lapham) house in the middle of the night & eating in the kitchen before resuming their journey into Canada. The children observed this but knew that it had to be kept secret." Nathan Lapham is buried in the Friends' burying ground at the old Quaker Union near Peru. He died in 1890. "Early in life," according to his obituary," he espoused the anti-slavery cause." He was a delegate at the Spring 1837 organizational meeting of the Clinton County Anti-Slavery Society. He became a Republican State Senator and a friend to Abraham Lincoln. NCUGRHA Board member Jim Bailey identified where the Senator's home was located on River Road in the village of Peru and traced it to the current owners, Nancy and Vince Sunderland.

It's a small world. Nancy was our real estate agent when my wife, Vivian, and I purchased a home in Saranac some years ago. Vince coincidentally happens to be a brother of Lincoln Sunderland who owns the Keese Homestead on Harkness and Union Roads. Last year, NCUGRHA sponsored a fundraiser to replace a historic marker at Lincoln and his wife Ann's home.

Members of NCUGRHA's Historic Sites Committee are investigating other possible sites. Our findings will be kept on file.



Vince and Nancy Sunderland and their home.



On The Trail of John Brown-- Our Family's Journey to the Promised Land

By Steven Ives

Edited by Lita Kelly

During the past six years, my family and I have been blessed to live in this land that many here call the North Country. We had not initially intended to make this our home, but over those six years, the love for the community, the scenery, and the history has won our hearts and taken us captive. The story of our journey here in itself would fill many pages, but this is not the place for that tale to be told. Instead, this is the story of our family's love affair with the history of our North Country, our state, and our nation that led us here.

For a number of years, my wife and I had a vision of where we wanted our family to be and how we wanted our family to live. Along with that vision was a hope that we would someday live in an old home, a home with some character and maybe even a wee bit of history. I have always been a student of history, albeit never to the degree that my interest has increased since moving to the Adirondack Park. With six children still in the nest, we are a Christian home schooling family that likes to take every opportunity to learn about the history that surrounds us. Having lived in the town of North Elba for five years, we came to know and love the history of the region--especially the story of John Brown.

Since arriving in the Adirondacks in May 2004, my family and I have been privileged to have lived in two 19th-century homes in North Elba. The first was a home on the Cascade Road on the way to Lake Placid, in the area near the bobsled run. At one time this region was known as the Cascade settlement, and later, Cascade Ville.

Gerrit Smith, an important abolitionist, gave a number of land grants in this area to free black men. [Editor's note: Some of the grantees had escaped to the North on the Underground Railroad. See Winter 2008/Spring 2009 *Lantern*.] Stories have been told of people finding remnants of their presence. Current owners of the house we lived in believed it to have been built in the early part of the 1800's. The method in which the house was constructed would support that. Little is known about the history of the house, but we often wondered if it was indeed in existence at the time of John Brown's arrival in North Elba. He probably would have known the owners or occupants and may have even paid them a visit from time to time. One can only wonder.

The second home our family lived in was the old Peacock farmhouse at the end of Bear Cub Lane in Lake Placid. William Peacock arrived in North Elba around the same time John Brown first made his appearance in the area. William and his brother purchased some land in the present day Adirondack Lodge area from Gerrit Smith. The land was not as he hoped it would be, so William purchased land off Bear Cub Lane in 1859 and moved his family there. Throughout this time, William Peacock and John Brown were good friends and neighbors. William even worked some of the Brown farmland in return for shares. At the start of the Civil War, William enlisted in Company C, 118th Regiment New York Volunteers and fought for three years. When John's wife, Mary, and the remnants of her family left North Elba in 1863, she gave the Peacock family a table that had belonged to John. It's still in the possession of the Peacock family today.

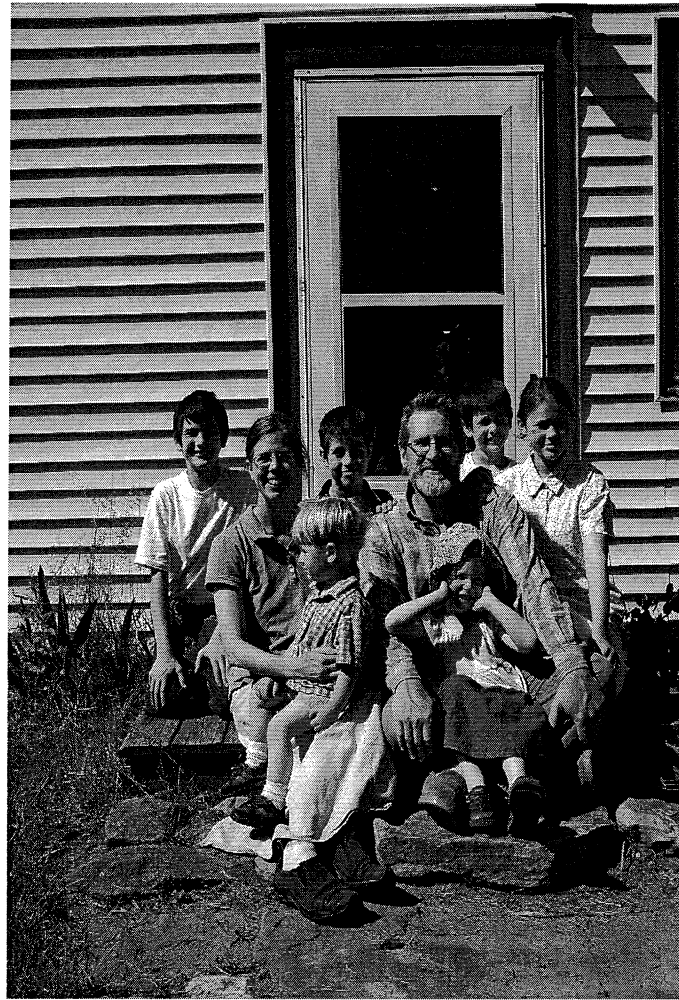
The privilege and enjoyment of having lived for four years on the farm of a known friend of John Brown has not escaped our family. We cherish those memories and have made some exciting discoveries, including the day two of my sons found William Peacock's gravestone. Walking the fields and gazing at the distant mountains that the Peacocks and the Browns shared will forever remain in our thoughts and in our hearts.

Having been tenants for five years, my wife and I felt the time was right to become homeowners again. We'd been looking for just the right home and property to fit the needs of our growing family. In March of 2009, we finally made the decision to make an offer on a home with property in the Town of Lewis that we had looked at earlier. The home had been vacant and mostly unattended for the past two years. We knew little about the house other than the fact that it was constructed around 1820 and that it needed a lot of work before we could move in. During the long process of contracting for and financing our purchase, my wife and I began to explore county records on the history of ownership of the property. Thus began a year long discovery adventure.

Through our research at the Essex County Clerk's office, the Adirondack History Center Museum Library, and through the Internet, we were amazed to discover that our own "soon-to-be" property had many past owners who had contributed greatly to our local, state, and even national history. Previous owners included Platt Rogers, Phillip Schuyler, Morgan Lewis, Dr. William Livingston, James Gray Livingston, Robert Wilson Livingston, LaRhett Livingston, and John E. Milholland.

James Gray Livingston is especially interesting. His family was a branch of the Livingstons of Livingston Manor fame, a family that produced many persons of importance in our state and country's history. James came to the Town of Lewis with his parents in 1817 at the age of 15. They established a farm and eventually built a proper house around 1820. James married Rosetta Woodruff in 1822, gaining possession of the Livingston home and farm in 1828 when his father, Dr. William Livingston, left Lewis for a time. James then became a leader in the local Congregational Church, being known

as the Deacon. He served his community and labored to bring an end to the inhumanity of slavery in this country. He was said to be a zealous abolitionist, a founding member of the Essex County Anti-Slavery Society, and an active member of the Underground Railroad. His activities in the anti-slavery movement are said to have begun in the 1830's, making him one of the early pioneers of the movement in this area.



The Ives Family. In the back, Noah, Elijah, Daniel and Hannah. In the front, Julie and Zadok; Steve and Nazel.

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The Livingston family of Lewis, New York, produced other notable individuals of merit in the cause of freedom for African-American slaves. James's brother Robert Wilson Livingston was 7 years old when he arrived in Lewis. During his adult life, he was founder and editor of both the Essex County and the Elizabethtown Post, an attorney, and Essex County Clerk. At the age of 52, during the Civil War, he became captain of Company F of the 118th Regiment of the New York State Volunteers. Robert's signature is on a petition to the U.S. Congress urging the prohibition of slavery in all the territories of the United States. This petition, dated 17 June 1850, is in our National Archives. Robert's son A.C. Hand Livingston was a member of the honor guard present at the Essex County Court House when the body of John Brown was brought there. Orlando Kellogg Jr., another nephew of James Gray Livingston (his wife's sister Polly's son) was also a member of that honor guard.

It may be safe to assume that, with the devotion of the Livingston family and their relatives to the Abolitionist cause, they may have known John Brown on a personal level. The person responsible for John Brown's presence in North Elba was Gerrit Smith. Smith's mother was a Livingston, related to the Livingstons of Livingston Manor, thus making James and Smith cousins. It is known that during his travels to and from North Elba, John Brown passed through Elizabethtown on his way to Westport. Could it be possible that he may have journeyed a small distance off that route to visit the cousin of his largest supporter, who was also a leader in the abolitionist movement of Essex County? Our family would like to find the answer to that question as we continue our adventure into the past. In the meantime, I believe we have found our old home with a wee bit of history.

Become an active member of NCUGRHA. Join one of our committees and enjoy the excitement of recovering our stories of freedom.

Bustin' Out All Over

This Summer NCUGRHA will have its first intern--SUNY Plattsburgh Museum Science and Anthropology student **Joan Estabrook**. Joan will help Helen Nerska gather material for a Visitors Manual. Joan will also begin cataloguing the Calarco Collection gifted to us by UGRR historian Tom Calarco, the author of *The Underground Railroad in the Adirondack Region (2004)* and four other UGRR books including the upcoming *Places of the Underground Railroad, a Geographical Guide*. We have already found a document in Tom's collection which DeKalb historian **Bryan Thompson** needed for a lecture in St. Lawrence County.

Documents can become documentaries, and after **Linda Richardson** joined NCUGRHA at the Agent level, she watched her gift, our DVD *Northward to Freedom*, four times. Then she invited Don Papson to give a presentation to her SUNY Plattsburgh class of practicing teachers. And then she agreed to chair our Education Committee. Linda and **Jan McCormick** are going to make a great team. Jan is an experienced museum educator with exciting ideas for children. Jan's friend, Andy Black, organized the excavations at the S. K. Smith barn. There is proof in the old adage, "Good things are worth waiting for." For five years we dreamed of saving the barn, and now we have a terrific committee chaired by architectural engineer **Glenn Erb**. And we have the wisdom of barn rehabilitator and restoration mason, **Bill Umbreit**, a good friend of Helen Nerska's. In no time at all, Glenn and Bill cut away the dangerous section of a sagging overhead floor and made the barn safe for Andy to conduct archaeological digs. **Frank and Jacquelyn Perusse** are already thinking of ways they can put the barn back into agricultural use. To fulfill the dreams of our Education, Exhibits and Barn Restoration Committees, we need money, and **Jacqueline Madison** is heading our Development Committee. **Frank Kinnelly** is in charge of the Finance Committee. Next we will activate the Public Relations Committee.

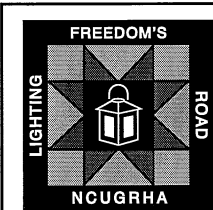
The North Country is a far cry from Broadway where the musical **Carousel** premiered in 1945 with the hit song, **June is Bustin' Out All Over**. But that is our song this June of 2010.

John Brown Home Closed or Open?



Photo by Laura Sells Doyle.

New York's budget crisis prevented the John Brown Farm from opening this year on May 1st as it usually does. Site Manager Brendan Mills continued to maintain the grounds which remained open to the public. Just before the Memorial Day weekend, Albany politicians hammered out a financial arrangement: the John Brown Farm, and all the other parks and historic sites which had been slated for closure, will be open.



Proudly wear our new logo as a beautiful red and blue cloisonné enamel pin. One for \$10; Three for \$25

Order Online:
www.northcountryunderground.com

The North Country Lantern

The North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association, a not for profit 501(c) 3 educational organization, is dedicated to the preservation, interpretation and promotion of the history of the Champlain Line of the Underground Railroad. Our geographical corridor encompasses Northeastern New York's Waterways to Freedom: the Upper Hudson River, the Champlain Canal and Lake Champlain.

President, Don Papson
Vice President, Margaret Gibbs
Treasurer, Ramatoylaye Djermakoye
Secretary, Kathy Lavoie

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