

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NETWORK TO FREEDOM**

GENERAL INFORMATION

Type (pick one): Site Facility Program

Name (of what you are nominating): Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site

Address: 110 Federal Park Road

City, State, Zip: Gallitzin, PA 16641

County: Cambria

Congressional District: PA12

Physical Location of Site/facility (if different):

Address not for publication?

Date Submitted:

Summary: Tell us in 200 words or less what is being nominated and how it is connected to the Underground Railroad.

The Allegheny Portage Railroad and Main Line Canal were part of the Pennsylvania Main Line of Public Works, a state-run transportation system connecting Philadelphia and Pittsburgh from the 1830s to 1850s. This system, usually just called the "Main Line," was a combination of canals, railroads, and inclined planes that moved passengers and cargo across the state. From 1834 when the system opened in its entirety until 1854 when the Pennsylvania Railroad opened, the Main Line was the primary east-west transportation route in Pennsylvania. The 36 mile stretch of the Main Line between Hollidaysburg and Johnstown known as the Allegheny Portage Railroad was also used by people escaping slavery as a transportation route. This application will cover Underground Railroad activities in both Johnstown and Hollidaysburg and will discuss how the Allegheny Portage Railroad linked the two.

Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site is a unit of the National Park Service and was authorized by Congress in 1964 to preserve the history of the Allegheny Portage Railroad and its part in the Main Line.

FOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE USE ONLY

I hereby certify that this site facility program is included in the Network to Freedom.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Owner/Manager (Share contact information X Y N)

Name: Keith Newlin, Deputy Superintendent WEPA National Parks

Address: c/o Allegheny Portage Railroad NHS, 110 Federal Park Road

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Phone: 814-886-6121 **Fax:** 814-886-0206 **E-mail:** Keith_Newlin@nps.gov

Owner/Manager (Share contact information Y N)

Name:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Phone: **Fax:** **E-mail:**

Owner/Manager (Share contact information Y N)

Name:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Phone: **Fax:** **E-mail:**

Application Preparer (Enter only if different from contact above.) (Share contact information X Y N)

Name: Megan O'Malley

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Privacy Information: The Network to Freedom was established, in part, to facilitate sharing of information among those interested in the Underground Railroad. Putting people in contact with others who are researching related topics, historic events, or individuals or who may have technical expertise or resources to assist with projects is one of the most effective means of advancing Underground Railroad commemoration and preservation. Privacy laws designed to protect individual contact information (i.e., home or personal addresses, telephone numbers, fax numbers, or e-mail addresses), may prevent NPS from making these connections. If you are willing to be contacted by others working on Underground Railroad activities and to receive mailings about Underground Railroad-related events, please add a statement to your letter of consent indicating what information you are willing to share.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom to nominate properties, facilities, and programs to the Network to Freedom. A Federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to, a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number. Response to this request is required for inclusion in the Network to Freedom in accordance with the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act (P.L. 105-203).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 25 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the National Coordinator, National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, NPS, 601 Riverfront Drive, Omaha, Nebraska 68102.



SITES:

In addition to the responses to each question, applications must also include the following attachments:

- 1) Letters of consent from all property owners for inclusion in the Network to Freedom (see sample in instructions)
- 2) Text and photographs of all site markers
- 3) Original photographs illustrating the current appearance and condition of the site being nominated
- 4) Maps showing the location of the site

S1. Type:

Building Object District (neighborhood)

Structure Landscape/natural feature Archeological site

Other (describe): National Park Service Unit

S2. Is the site listed in the National Register of Historic Places? Y N

What is the listing name:

S3. Ownership of site:

Private Private, non-profit (501c3) Multiple ownership

Public, local government Public, state government Public, federal government

S4a. Type(s) of Underground Railroad Association (select the one(s) that fit best)

Station Assoc. w/ prominent person Rebellion site Legal challenge

Escape Rescue Kidnapping Maroon community

Destination Church w/active congregation Cemetery Transportation route

Military site Commemorative site/monument historic district/neighborhood

Archeological site Other (*describe*)

S4. Describe the site's association and significance to the Underground Railroad. Provide citations. Timelines are encouraged.

The Allegheny Portage Railroad and Main Line Canal were part of the Pennsylvania Main Line of Public Works, a state-run transportation system connecting Philadelphia and Pittsburgh from the 1830s to 1850s. This system, usually just called the "Main Line," was a combination of canals, railroads, and inclined planes that moved passengers and cargo across the state. From 1834 when the system opened in its entirety until 1854 when the Pennsylvania Railroad opened, the Main Line was the primary east-west transportation route in Pennsylvania. The system revolutionized transportation, reducing travel time between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh from around three weeks to about four to seven days. The Main Line was operated by a department of the state



government called the Board of Canal Commissioners, some of whose members at various times were the famous abolitionists Elijah Pennypacker and Thaddeus Stevens. In 2010, most of the easternmost division of the Main Line between Philadelphia and Columbia, a section that was a railroad, was added to the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

This application will cover the Allegheny Portage Railroad, a 36 mile stretch of the Main Line that connected Hollidaysburg and Johnstown using a series of inclined planes and levels. Rail cars were hauled up the inclined planes using stationary steam engines and were pulled by horses, mules and later locomotive engines along the level sections.

The records of William Whipper and Stephen Smith, which were of great importance in the Network to Freedom application for that section of the Main Line are also extremely relevant to this application.

William Whipper and Stephen Smith were wealthy black businessmen and lumber merchants from Columbia, one of the “ports” of the Main Line. The firm of Smith and Whipper owned a fleet of railroad cars and canal boats that they used to ship goods across the state on the Main Line. In *Still's Underground Rail Road Records* by William Still, Whipper himself describes how he used his company's transportation line to aid runaway slaves:

On their arrival they were generally hungry and penniless. I have received hundreds in this condition; fed and sheltered from one to seventeen at a time in a single night. At this point (Columbia) the road forked; some I sent west by boats to Pittsburgh, and others to you (Still) in our cars to Philadelphia.... In a period of three years from 1847 to 1850, I passed hundreds to the land of freedom, while others, induced by high wages, and the feeling that they were safe in Columbia, worked in the lumber and coal yards of that place (Still, p. 736).

Those runaways sent “west by boats to Pittsburgh” would have traversed the Main Line Canal and Allegheny Portage Railroad. The fugitives sent by railroad cars to Philadelphia would have travelled on the Columbia and Philadelphia Railroad, the easternmost division of the Main Line that is now listed on the Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.



Hollidaysburg

One of the best documented and least known incidents related to Underground Railroad activity in western Pennsylvania is James Parsons, Jr.'s attempt to capture runaway slave Jacob Green and Parsons' subsequent arrest on kidnapping charges. This incident occurred in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania in October 1855.

Between August 15-19, 1855, Jacob Green escaped from the farm of Colonel Isaac Parsons of Romney, Hampshire County, Virginia (today West Virginia). At an unknown date, Green returned, stole a horse and escaped for a second time. In October he came back again and helped five slaves escape that belonged to Mr. Stump, a neighbor and relative of Parsons. Isaac Parsons, his nephew James Parsons, Jr. and Stump, headed north to track Green and the five other runaways. Somewhere between Virginia and Hollidaysburg, two of Stump's slaves were captured and taken back to Hampshire County. Based on information gathered from the two individuals who were captured, the group knew that Green was likely to head west using the Allegheny Portage Railroad and Main Line Canal to Pittsburgh. They were strategically placed; Colonel Parsons was in Johnstown, Parsons Jr. in Hollidaysburg, and Stump in Altoona.

The incident is described by Virginia Attorney General J.R. Tucker in *House Document 68*, a record of Virginia legislative activity from 1855- 1856. Tucker was sent to represent the interests of the Commonwealth of Virginia at the January 1856 trial of James Parsons, Jr. by Governor Henry A. Wise. An excerpt from Tucker's report to Wise follows.

On the morning of the 20th of October, between 7 and 8 o'clock, Jake Green took his seat in the cars at Hollidaysburg, having (as I understood) obtained a ticket for Pittsburgh. A short distance (about one or two hundred yards) from the depot, James Parsons, Jr. took his seat in the same train with Jake Green; and in a few moments afterwards, the latter, though the train was in rapid motion, was seen to jump from the platform of a car, fall, recover himself, and with a black carpet bag in hand, run towards the town again, crying "murder" while



Parsons, Jr. who had with more success jumped from the car, pursued the fugitive.

Some bystanders, who saw the pursuit, supposing as they said, that the negro had stolen the carpet bag, interposed to arrest him, when he turned into the cellar of a house in the town. He was there arrested and taken hold of by Mr. Parsons, Jr. who, without violence, and only by the use of so much force as was necessary, urged the negro in the direction of Kellerman's tavern.

During the walk to Kellerman's, Parsons charged upon the negro, calling him by name, that he had stolen a horse. (When the negro had last gone off from Hampshire, a horse had been taken away, as stated in Col. Parsons' advertisement.) The negro replied, that he had run away, but had not stolen the horse, and when addressing him, called Mr. Parsons by his Christian name.

Upon reaching the tavern, a good many persons had collected, and Parsons requested of Kellerman to permit him to take the negro into his house. The request was granted. A free negro, Sydney Carr, told Jake Green to go into the house, that no one would hurt him, and that he (Carr) would attend to him, and added, "will see you righted."

At this time, a considerable excitement had sprung up respecting the affair; and while Parsons with several persons went into Kellerman's tavern, many remained outside; and it would seem, from what afterwards occurred, that the free negro Carr retired to prepare for what was to come.

In the house Parsons again charged the negro he had arrested, with stealing the horse, and with running away, calling him by his name, "Jake." The negro denied the horse stealing, but admitted the running away; called Parsons by his Christian name again, and seemed to recognize his own, as called by Parsons, claiming no other, (and certainly not that of Francis S. Johnson, with which he was gifted by the indictments against Parsons;) asked where Parsons was going to take him; and on being told that he would take him "home," replied that he was willing to go home, and wished to do so. In fact, it was proved by one witness that the negro called Parsons "master."

The prosecutor in the case, a certain George Potts, detailed as circumstances occurring in the tavern, what no other witness mentions. As upon his shoulders rests the idiom of this outrageous persecution, it would seem not unnatural that he had heard statements between Parsons and the slave, less conclusive of Parsons' innocence, than those which abound in the testimony of others less interested in his conviction. Yet, when viewed through any other medium than that of fanatical zeal or of officious intermeddling in the concerns of others, the facts, with the attending circumstances of the case, which he mentions, should have satisfied him of the entire innocence of the party against whom he lodged the most unfounded charge of kidnapping.



He testified that while Parsons was charging the negro with horse stealing and with being a fugitive slave, the negro, as he thinks, denied both- and when Parsons called him by name and said "you know me very well, Jake" the negro replied, "oh! no - Mr. George, I don't know you or anyone in this room:" thus, though feigning entire ignorance, evincing a real recognition of Parsons, by assigning to him an unreal name. It is proper to add that this statement of Potts was confirmed by no other witness in the cause.

While in the tavern Parsons asked "Jake" if he had any weapons, which the negro at first denied; but when a revolver, with its six barrels loaded, was taken from his pocket, he was constrained to acquiesce in so conclusive a refutation, with the disclaimer of malicious intent against any one.

In the mean time Parsons ordered his horses, and prepared to start. The negro, with Parsons, and others who were there, went out of a side door into an alley leading from the stable yard of the tavern to the street of the town; and upon being told to mount one of the horses, did so, in the language of a witness; "as freely as any man would, who was starting upon a journey."

Upon reaching the street, the negro attempted to turn his horse towards the main part of the town, while Parsons turned his own from the town, and towards the country. The crowd began to assemble; some cries were raised, directed to Parsons, "you d-d fool, you cannot take that man in that way;" and others to the negro, "d-n you, make your escape, you have the best horse of the two;"- "why don't you jump off" &c. The negro, in reply to Parsons, telling him to come on, said he had left some money with a negro man in Hollidaysburg, which he wanted to get "before you take me away." Parsons told him to come on, he would give it to him, &c.

In this hesitation, the cry was raised, "jump and make your escape, d-n you." Potts says this cry came from all round, apparently. The negro, who was not bound in any way, jumped from the horse and ran. He was caught first by Kellerman, but broke away- was then caught by Lentz, and was thus again arrested, and in the hands of Parsons who had left his horses to secure the negro.

Potts says that he remarked to Lentz, when he was holding the negro, "you would be as profitably employed at your own business;" to which Lentz replied, that he "would help any time to take a d-d horse thief."

Lentz fixes at this time, or a short time previously, this remark of Potts, the prosecutor, "He is nothing but a d-d nigger catcher or kidnapper."

Hall, another witness, says, that about this time he took Potts by the arm and told him he had better come away; that Parsons was taking the negro as a fugitive, and he (Potts) had better let him alone. Potts



replied that he “should” or “could” not take him, unless he showed his authority.

Potts then says, in which all the other witnesses concur, that Parsons and the negro were struggling in the street, the latter pressing towards Sydney Carr’s (free negro) barber shop, and Parsons attempting to get him towards Kellerman’s tavern. At the same time, the free negroes had gathered in considerable force, and some negro had hold of Parsons, and Potts says his attention was attracted by the words, “Now stand back; give the nigger a chance; break his d-d head.” Several of the negroes were in front of Parsons, and squared off” in the attitude of fighting him.”

During this state of things, Parsons, with remarkable coolness and determination, retained his hold upon his fugitive, with a crowd around him, threatening and unfriendly.

One of the witnesses farther states, that Potts, at the time Lentz had caught the negro said, “That is too bad” and was stepping forward, when he was dissuaded from interference, and was told to let them fight it out themselves. Potts replied, “I will not- the man is a free man, and shall be saved.”

By this time, the crowd around Parsons and his fugitive had gathered about the walk in front of Carr’s barber shop. Potts then advanced, and demanded of Parsons his authority for arresting the negro. He says, he told him, if the negro had stolen a horse, and he (Parsons) had a warrant, to show it, and he should be assisted in the execution of the law; that if he had no authority, he should go before a justice and make the proper oath, and as a law abiding people, the people would assist him.

Upon the occurrences, which follow, some difference naturally exists among the witnesses. Upon the demand of authority for the arrest, Parsons was, according to some witnesses, at first silent, but afterwards answered, “That is my business;” that Potts not others had a right to demand his authority, nor was he bound to give it. And according to one witness, said, that it was his negro, and the had a right to take him wherever he got him- or words to that effect. Potts and perhaps some other person replied, “Remember, sir, you are in Pennsylvania, and under Pennsylvania laws,” and still demanded his authority. Parsons, then somewhat excited, replied, that he did not care a d-m for Pennsylvania nor Pennsylvania laws- that he was acting under higher authority- he held the negro under the laws of his own state. This reply produced considerable excitement in the crowd, who rushed in around the parties.

Hall, a respectable witness, says he heard someone at this time (he thinks a certain Col. Piper) say, that he (Parsons) was a kidnapper, looked like a d-m kidnapper, and ought to be made to let the negro go.



Potts then laid his hand on Parsons' shoulder, and said, "Sir if you have no authority, you shall (or must) release him."

It further appeared that when it was proposed to Parsons to go before a justice of the peace, he objected, on the ground that the negro might get away. Some one proposed to aid in securing him, (the negro,) but no one offered to do so; and the proposal to Parsons to go before a justice was not acceded to by him.

Among those who demanded of Parsons his authority for the arrest was Sydney Carr, the free negro barber, who did so, asking the release of the negro, took from him his carpet bag, and in the language of a witness, "drew his fist" upon Parsons.

How the negro was released- by what hand- by whose immediate instrumentality- the proofs in the case left in doubt. The exact point of time when the hold of Parsons upon the slave was relinquished was not determined by the evidence. Potts did not even mention, in his evidence in chief, the escape of the negro, so immaterial to him was that incident of the affair; and upon cross examination, he stated that he did not know personally where the negro then (at the date of the trial) was, nor at what time he got off, but admits it was about the time he asked Parsons for his authority.

Crawford says it was about the time Potts laid his hand upon Parsons, and demanded his authority, or the slave's release, that Parsons and the slave were separated.

Potts and Hall say, that Parsons at last said he would show his authority, and put his hand into the side pocket, and then the outside pocket, behind, of his overcoat, when Crawford, with a cry that Parsons was about to shoot Potts, seized the hand of Parsons in the pocket, held it for a moment, and the negro was not seen afterwards.

McDonald, another witness, says, that when Parsons put one hand in his pocket, as just mentioned, he retained his hold of the negro with the other; that Potts had hold of Parsons, and Crawford took hold of the negro, and parted them, and the negro got away. Mr. Crawford says he does not remember having hold of the negro at all.

The negro escaped either through the barber shop, or the house adjoining- and the free man of color, in a free state, fled from the grasp of Parsons, and has not since that day been seen in the town of Hollidaysburg.

The two portions of the Main Line on which Jacob Green planned to travel were:



1. The 36-mile long Allegheny Portage Railroad, which was the means by which canal boats were hauled over the mountains by railroad and inclined planes between the two main portions of the canal from Hollidaysburg to Johnstown;

2. The Western Division of the Main Line Canal, which ran 105 miles between Johnstown and Pittsburgh. Travel on the Allegheny Portage Railroad would have taken Green about six hours. Travel on the Western Division would have taken about a day and a half.

Jacob Green's plan to travel the Allegheny Portage Railroad to Johnstown and the western division of the Main Line to Pittsburgh was most certainly a viable one. Johnstown and Pittsburgh, his destination, had well developed networks of Underground Railroad supporters.

Johnstown

In a letter dated April 23, 1900 Cyrus Pershing describes Underground Railroad activity in Johnstown to James M. Swank, Esq. Swank is the author of, *Cambria County Pioneers*, a collection of biographical sketches of prominent citizens that was published in 1910. The book took several years to research and Pershing's letter is likely a response to a research related inquiry from Swank. The following is an excerpt from that letter, (Appendix A).

... contrary to your belief, Johnstown was a station on the underground railway. One item of the evidence for conclusion is this: You doubtless remember Samuel Williams, a superior man of his race. One night, about 2 o'clock, he came to the grocery and provision store our family kept, and routed us out. He was in a great hurry and a good deal agitated. He explained, confidentially, that he wanted some food for two runaway slaves who, of course, feared pursuit. He got what he wanted, and, I believe, himself piloted the negroes that night down along the slackwater (the Mainline canal) through Laurel Hill gap, on their way to Dr. Mitchell's farm, near the town of Indiana. Williams made confidants of my brother Israel and myself. After he removed with his family to Liberia, I collected the money from the sale of his property at the corner of Market and Canal Streets, near the Cambria Iron Co. store. Williams was not alone as agent for the underground fugitive slave road.



Cyrus Pershing was among the most prominent citizens of Cambria County, earning his own extensive entry in the book that Swank published as a prominent lawyer, state legislator and judge (Swank, p. 99-107). Samuel Williams' connection to the Underground Railroad is undoubtedly much more extensive than indicated in this letter. Williams lived in Johnstown from about 1837 until 1853 when he emigrated to Liberia and had ties with the most prominent African American abolitionists and anti-slavery activists in Pittsburgh and in fact, in the nation (Williams, p. 7). Samuel Williams was a member of both the Pennsylvania Anti- Slavery Society (Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, p.62) and the American Anti-Slavery Society (American Anti-Slavery Society, 1834 p.36). In the December 16, 1846, edition of, *The Mystery*, the seminal anti-slavery newspaper written by prominent Underground Railroad agent and anti-slavery activist Martin Delany, Samuel Williams is listed as an agent, or distributor, of the paper in Johnstown. Pershing and Williams are far from the only citizens of Johnstown associated with the Underground Railroad.

Cyrus Elder, another prominent citizen of Cambria County and outspoken anti-slavery advocate wrote the following letter dated July 31, 1858.

Dear Friend,

Is there a station or depot of the U.G.R.R. in Johnstown and if so who is the conductor? I have a very likely passenger in charge that the human bloodhounds are after with the incentive of a large reward. He is safe for the present, but I desire to get him to Pittsburgh into the hands of friends. The misfortune is that I do not know the ropes in either Johnstown or Pittsburg (sic).

I shall be careful to compromise no one. Write to me by the Monday's mail. I know no one it would be safe to write to except you, and depend upon your advice and discretion.

In haste yours,

Cyrus Elder



This letter was sent to Edwin A. Vickroy and is currently in a collection of his papers housed at the Somerset Historical Society (Appendix B). Vickroy, like Elder was prominent citizen of the county and was over the course of his life was a farmer, surveyor and merchant. For most of life, and specifically at the time the letter from Elder was written, Vickroy lived in Ferndale, a town about 3 miles from downtown Johnstown.

Another individual from Johnstown with ties to the Underground Railroad is James Heslop. Heslop moved to Johnstown in 1832 and in volume III of his book, History of Cambria County, (p. 139) Henry Wilson Storey provides these details about Heslop and his affiliation with Main Line.

From that time until 1842 he was employed by the transportation companies in the region, at first with the canal boat builders, and afterward with the car builders for the old Portage railroad, for a he was a skillful letterer and with his finely mixed colors did an excellent business in painting the names of the canal boats on the stern and the company's name on the sides of the cars.

In the same of volume of his, History of Cambria County, (p.139-140) Storey describes Heslop's Underground Railroad activities.

During the several years immediately preceding the Civil War he took an earnest part in the general agitation of the slavery question, and arrayed himself clearly and firmly on the side of those who most bitterly opposed it. Indeed, he was one of the rankest Abolitionists in all the region, and held in utter contempt any measure that tolerated traffic in human beings, white or black. In political life he originally was a Whig, and later a strong Republican. For the negro he had no particular regard, but he could not bear to see one of God's creatures held in bondage. The comfortable Heslop home in Johnstown was a noted station on the famous "Underground Railroad" between the slave states of the south and the free soil of the north. Pennsylvania territory then offered no secure place of refuge for escaping slaves, for the state was continually overrun with fugitive slave hunters, and no house and no home was safe against their searching parties armed with processes of law and the equally obnoxious sanction of certain state authorities. But notwithstanding all this, the home of James Gale Heslop offered at least safe temporary refuge to fugitive slaves, and both he and his good wife were instrumental in aiding them, feeding them and sending them along in safety to more friendly regions farther north, where slave



hunters dare not follow. In his ardent belief in and advocacy of the universal freedom of mankind, Mr. Heslop subscribed for fifty copies of the Philadelphia North American, one of the leading abolition organs of the country, and caused them to be distributed and read in places where the doctrines therein taught would be calculated to do the most good. And in his zeal in aiding escaping slaves he prepared several secret places about his home in which they were temporarily secure. One of these places was in an old abandoned mine on the hill near his house, another in the house itself, under the roof, and still another in a secret cellar underneath his stable, which was entered through a trap door on which his horses were bedded after the fugitive had been placed. His premises were frequently visited and searched by slave hunters, but not so much as one was ever taken while at his station.

Storey discusses the Underground Railroad activity of the Heslop household again in Volume I of, *History of Cambria County* (p.190-191).

After the repeal of the Missouri Compromise which was substantially done in the famous compromise of 1850, an incident occurred in Johnstown which discloses strong conviction and decision of character, with a beautiful sentiment expressed by Mrs. James Heslop, who as well as her husband was an Abolitionist. An escaping slave had reached this town and had been secreted in Cushon's coal bank, under Green Hill, by John Cushon, and other agents of the Underground Railroad. Soon thereafter, Mr. and Mrs. Heslop were sitting in their room on the second floor, a knock was heard at the front door. It was about dusk, and Mr. Heslop, going to the door, became engaged in conversation with the visitor, which continued some time. Mrs. Heslop, being acquainted with the escape, divined the matter to which the conversation related. Going to the top of the stairs, she heard the visitor pleading with her husband to tell him where the fugitive was, and offering him twenty-five dollars for the information. Still Mr. Heslop denied any knowledge of the affair. Hearing the offer increased to seventy dollars, she descended the stairway, quietly walked to the door and closed it. In referring to it to a friend she mildly said: "I was afraid James might be tempted."

In the foreword of his three volume work, *History of Cambria County*, (p.iii), Storey acknowledges the assistance of James M. Swank, George T. Swank and Anderson H. Walters of the Johnstown *Tribune* newspaper in preparing this work. James M. Swank has already been cited as the author of, *Cambria County Pioneers*. Swank researched his book through correspondence and personal interviews and his



inclusion is a strong indication that two men shared research. The acknowledgment of the men who operated the newspaper and the level of detail he includes in his history strongly suggests that Storey conducted much of his research using the archives of the *Johnstown Tribune*.

Furthermore, oral accounts suggest that Storey researched this three volume set for several decades before publication and so would have been able to acquire information through personal interviews with witnesses. Since its publication in 1907 the *History of Cambria County* has been considered the most complete and accurate account of the history of the region and has been cited by scholars of Cambria county history. Nathan Shappee, in his doctoral thesis on the Johnstown Flood of 1889 cites this book as does David McCullough, the prominent historian and author of, *The Johnstown Flood*. Many of the individuals discussed in the work or close relations of those individuals were alive at the time of publication and there is no record of any attempt to discredit or contradict what Storey wrote. So although Storey does not provide citations in his work, we consider his work reliable enough to include in this application.

Main Line – Western Division

Although beyond the scope of this application, documentation about Underground Railroad activity along the Main Line west of Johnstown is being included to demonstrate the larger context within which the Allegheny Portage Railroad transportation route existed. It is unlikely that Hollidaysburg or Johnstown would have provided long term residency opportunities for people escaping enslavement and as indicated above, fugitives passed through quickly en route to safer locations.

Blairsville, a town on the Main Line thirty miles and approximately nine hours by canal boat from Johnstown, is also known to have hosted Underground Railroad activity. In 2006 the annual reenactment of an 1858 incident that occurred in the town was recognized with an Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Star. This



description of that event is taken from

<http://www.undergroundrailroadblairsvillepa.com/Rescue1858.php>

In the spring of 1858, Robert Stump, a slave catcher from Virginia and Peter Heck, a tailor from Uniontown, PA came to Blairsville. Stump claimed to have a federal warrant for a fugitive slave named Richard Newman who had been living in town for about 6 years. When Stump spotted Newman on the street, he sent Heck to capture him. As Newman fought to escape, an angry mob of townspeople poured into the street and pulled Newman away to safety. The mob drove Heck and Stump toward the Pennsylvania Canal.

Approximately 70 miles and just over 18 hours by canal boat from Blairsville fugitives would have reached Pittsburgh and the relative safety that the larger city would have afforded. In his book, *A Century and a Half of Pittsburgh History*, (p.539-540) John Boucher offers the following description of how the Underground Railroad operated along the tow path at the western terminus of the Mainline Canal in Pittsburgh.

A description of how the railroad was operated, given by William Stewart, a prominent businessman of fifty years ago has been preserved to us; "The bridge at Niagara Falls is the haven to which we send all hunted slaves," said Mr. Stewart. "On a Sunday morning I was just starting for church when a well known knock touched my door. I knew at once that church for me was in another direction. I opened my door leisurely, went out and turned to the right towards the east. About a block away, there was a little covered carriage that was very much in use in Pittsburgh at that time. They were called dearborns. When I left my own house there was a gentleman walking between the carriage and me. We did not speak to each other, but he turned down the first street. The curtains of the dearborn were all rolled up, and no person but the driver could be seen. It was made with a double bottom and the slave was lying flat between the upper and lower bottoms. The driver kept going on very leisurely. There was a ferry about where the Fortieth Street bridge is. We all got on the same ferry, but the driver never exchanged words with us. He was one of our wealthiest citizens and was wearing a fine pair of false whiskers. After we crossed the river the driver drove on the tow path of the canal. Finally the dearborn turned on a road running across Pine Creek below Sharpsburg. There another man came out of a house. The new man took the driver's place, while the other man took another direction, no one having spoken a word



since we started. The dearborn was then driven into a lonely place in the woods, where there was a "station" provided with all manner of disguises. Provided with these the slave was started on his way to Niagara. After leaving Pittsburgh, they were scarcely ever captured.

Underground Railroad activity was also well documented in the local newspapers including this notice that appeared in the July 13, 1855 edition of the *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser*, "Six fugitive slaves passed over the Ohio and Penn's R.R. a few days since, *en route* to Canada." Similar articles recounting the escape of slaves appeared in the Pittsburgh newspapers throughout the summer of 1855. And on June 20, 1855 the *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette and Advertiser* wrote, "We are delighted to observe daily indications of the steady increase of a northern sentiment".

People of the Main Line and Adjacent Area

As the main transportation artery virtually everyone traveling across Pennsylvania would have traveled on the Main Line. The Main Line must be viewed not just a method for carrying people and goods, but also a way to transmit ideas. In this light the presence of known abolitionists and people likely connected to the abolition movement as travelers on the Main Line becomes significant. Figures such as William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and Martin Delany would have utilized the Main Line when travelling to and from conferences and meetings in Pittsburgh since, until the mid-1850s, the Main Line was the only easy way to traverse the state.

In May 1844, Bishop Morris Brown and a large group of African Methodist Episcopal ministers and other delegates travelled on the Main Line between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to attend the AME General Conference in the latter location. Using railroad cars and canal boats, the party reached their destination in 84 hours (Handy, p. 154). On the canal portion of the journey between Johnstown and Pittsburgh, the following incident occurred:



One of our clergy had been separated from his brother when only two months old, and sold into grievous bondage; more than thirty-two years had elapsed, and he had never seen him, consequently knew not his person. That brother was now on board the *John Adams* (canal packet) as its steward. He saw him; passed him again and again, and spoke to him, but knew him not, until one of the ministers, who knew both, introduced them to each other! But who can describe the sublimity of this scene, or utter the rapture of their hearts! They embraced, they kissed, they rejoiced and wept! "I cannot express the emotion of my soul," said one, "but I feel all over." And joyful surprise went like electricity from soul to soul, and excited the whole company (Handy, p. 155).

At the conclusion of the conference, the group once more used the Main Line to cross the state to make their return to Philadelphia (Handy, p. 156).

Abolitionists Thaddeus Stevens and Elijah Pennypacker would have travelled the Main Line Canal and Allegheny Portage Railroad extensively during their tenure as canal commissioners in the late 1830s. As part of their duties as canal commissioners, they would have had to conduct many inspection tours throughout the entire system. Thaddeus Stevens was also involved as legal counsel in a land dispute case (*Summerhill v. Jackson*) in Hollidaysburg in 1849-50 (*Africa*, vol. 2, p. 11; *Davis*, vol. 1, p. 175-76). Stevens would have had to travel the Main Line to reach Hollidaysburg.

Abolitionist leader Senator Charles Sumner spent about one month convalescing near the summit of the Allegheny Portage Railroad following his caning in the senate chamber by Preston Brooks in 1856. Sumner rested and kept up with his voluminous correspondence at a resort called the Mountain House under the care of Dr. Robert Montgomery Smith Jackson (Filippelli, p. 152-53). The Mountain House was located in the town of Cresson, which was named for abolitionist and colonization advocate Elliott Cresson (1796-1854). While at the Mountain House, Sumner was also visited by the journalist, abolitionist, and Sumner supporter Jane Grey Swisshelm of Pittsburgh (Filippelli, p. 159).

The Allegheny Portage Railroad passed through the town of Wilmore (Jefferson in the days of the Portage). Jefferson was originally settled in the late 1700s by Godfrey Wilmore, a former slave from Maryland (who either escaped or purchased his freedom,



depending on the source), and his white, Irish-born wife, a former indentured servant. The Wilmores and their six children were “classed among the best people in the community” and were active in the local Roman Catholic parish, St. Bartholomew’s. At least two of their children married white members of the community. The children’s occupations included a teacher, carpenter, and agriculturalist. According to researcher Maureen Gore Mattiello, little mention was made of the Wilmore’s race. The Wilmores were so highly regarded by the local community that the town’s name was changed from Jefferson to Wilmore in 1860 (Mattiello, p. 26-30). It is not known if the Wilmores or the town had any involvement in the Underground Railroad, but Wilmore is just a few miles from Ebensburg, through which one of the other known Underground Railroad routes passed.

S5. Provide a history of the site since its time of significance to the Underground Railroad, including physical changes, changes in ownership or use.

In 1857 the Allegheny Portage Railroad was purchased from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR). Land for the Allegheny Portage Railroad NHS was first purchased from the PRR in the late 1960s and as the PRR changed hands, land was acquired from the new PRR owners. In the late 1960s the Pennsylvania Central Railroad purchased the PRR and in 1976 Conrail purchased the land and railroad tracks from the Pennsylvania Central Railroad.

The Staple Bend Tunnel unit of Allegheny Portage Railroad NHS, which encompasses 901 foot long railroad tunnel and approximately 2 miles of the trace of the portage railroad, was acquired through a different channel. This area was purchased from the PRR by the Cambria Iron Works in the 1890s and in the 1930s was purchased by Bethlehem Steel. The National Park Service purchased the land and Staple Bend Tunnel from Bethlehem Steel in the 1990s.

S6. Describe current educational programs, tours, markers, signs, brochures, site bulletins, or plaques at the site. Include text and photographs of markers.

There are not currently any site bulletins or exhibits related to the Underground Railroad of the specific incidents listed in this application at the site. Plans are underway to share this information with the public in a number of ways including the park website, site bulletins and exhibits. Over the summer of 2010 the stories and information related to this application were included in public interpretive programs and tours.

S7. Include a bibliography. Discuss historical sources of information and how you used them.

The bibliography follows. Several items are cited in the text of the narrative in S4 and the rest of the material was used as general background information. Included in the Appendix are letters cited in the narrative in section S4, as well as photos, maps and illustrations of the Main Line and Allegheny Portage Railroad.

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Richmond Enquirer, Richmond, VA February 1, 1856.

Staunton Spectator, Staunton, VA January 30, 1856.

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Staunton Spectator, Staunton, VA February 30, 1856.



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Appendix A

Pottsville, Pa., April 23,^d 1900.

James M. Swank, Esq.,

Dear Sir:-

Yours of the

20th inst., inclosing a letter from Mrs. Rev C.C.

Hays, is before me. In reply I would state that, contrary to your belief, Johnstown was a station on the underground railway.

One item of the evidence for my conclusion is this: You doubtless remember Samuel Williams, a superior man of his race. One night, about 2 o'clock, he came to the grocery and provision store our family kept, and routed us out. He was in a great hurry and a good deal agitated. He explained, confidentially, that he wanted some food for two runaway slaves who, of course, feared pursuit. He got what he wanted, and, I believe, himself piloted the negroes that night down along the slackwater through Laurel Hill gap, on their way to Dr. Mitchell's farm, near the town of Indiana. Williams made confidants of my brother Israel and myself. After



he removed with his family to Liberia, I collected the money from the sale of his property at the corner of Market and Canal Streets, near the Cambria Iron Co. store. Williams was not alone as agent for the underground fugitive slave rail road. How many of that class were aided in Johnstown I do not know. The Mitchell farm afforded a refuge to a good many of them. ^{^From there they were forwarded to Canada.} ^ Dr. M. was a noted abolitionist. He was finally arrested and tried in the U. S. Court at Pittsburgh, and, as I now recollect, convicted. The doctor was also charged with compelling the negroes to cultivate his farm; that he was guilty of cruelty to them; that they were while under his control systematically overworked, and under fed and under clothed. I suppose these charges were untrue, or, at least, much exaggerated.

That runaway negroes were sometimes concealed in coal banks about Johnstown, I have no doubt. Let me give you an incident of those ante bellum, negro hating days. There came to Johnstown a shoe maker, named Sam J. Smith, who opened a shop on Clinton Street. After a time he quit this business and started a tavern in a brick house on Clinton street, which stood just opposite the building in which Miss Pamilla Livermore had her school, and in which, years afterwards, Mr. Horne had his store. From there Smith moved into what in later years was called the Foster House, and continued the business of hotel keeping. Two black men (free) who at intervals were in his employ, disappeared, and it was the general belief that they were kidnapped, conveyed by Smith to Virginia or Maryland, and sold into slavery. Smith's general reputation was that of a kidnapper, and he was intensely hated by the colored population of Johnstown, and regarded with more than usual suspicion by many of the resident white citizens.



2*

The "old Bedford road," after the traveler left William Slick's, just beyond the modern Geistown, was[^] a rough, mountainous region very thinly populated. Indeed, there was a part of it on which for several miles there was not, at that day, a single human habitation, before you reached Barefoot's at the foot of the mountain, towards Schellsburgh and Bedford = On the occasion I now speak of, two fugitive slaves were closely pursued along this lonely route by their owner's or their agents. These pursuers asked the assistance of man named George Helsel, who lived somewhere along the line- I knew Helsel for years, a man of short stature, very red faced, ignorant and brutal. Helsel shot and badly wounded both of the negroes. They were captured, brought to town, and placed by their captors in the care of Smith until they would recover. The house in which Smith first kept tavern was unoccupied, and the wounded negroes were placed in it by Smith, and guarded.- One night, after they had been confined there for several weeks, they suddenly grew worse; they groaned as if in intense pain, and I well remember that it was said they could not live till morning. They were only playing "possum," for the next morning they were missing. How they were spirited away, what strategy was used, and by whom, I do not remember, if I ever knew = Search was made for them in coal banks, and elsewhere, but they were not found. I know from what Williams afterwords told me, that these men were concealed in a coal bank, after their rescue from Smith's clutches, and when the opportune time arrived, they were conducted directly to Canada: it was too risky to have then stop at Mitchell's farm on the way. Mrs. Pershing at that time, viz. when these fugitives were under the tender (?) care of Smith, was a pupil of Miss Livermore's school, just across the street, and she well remembers the excitement aroused by the occurrence in which Helsel, Smith et al, were principal actors.

The conviction of Dr. Mitchell, to which I refer above,

* The page number '2' atop the third page of the transcription refers to the second sheet of stationery used in the letter, rather than to the actual order in which the pages should be read.



was, I believe, for harboring runaway slaves. The records of the U.S. Court in Pittsburgh will be the best evidence on this point =

You say, "I remember something of the George Cupp incident ^{about} in 1848." &c- I would like to know to what you refer. The Cupp incident I have in memory, was, I am positive, ^{after} before 1848- As it has no direct relation to what Mrs. Hayes writes about, I will defer writing about it. It has occurred to me that William Slick would know something about the Helsel- Smith matter, as his family lived on the Johnstown end of the old road, which from its mountain loneliness afforded a comparatively safe part of the underground railroad = In writing to Mrs. Hayes make it understood that my name is not to be used as authority for any statements the Harvard young man may see proper to make. This may be on part an over cautious precaution.

While writing this hurried epistle, your letter, and P(orter?) inclosure were delivered by the mail messenge. I must postpone consideration of their contents, as a letter from Denver, rec'd at the same time, requires my prompt attention- I am rid of my cold, and was at church yesterday- Mrs. P & Gen are as usual. We all join in kind regards to Mrs. S. and yourself-

Yours very truly,
Cyrus L. Pershing



Appendix B

Somerset July 31st 1858

Dear Friend.

Is there a station or
Depot of the U. G. R. R. in Johnston
and if so who is Conductor?
I have a very likely passenger in
charge that the human blood-
hounds are after with the incentive
of a large reward. He is safe
for the present but I desire
to get him to Pittsburg into the
hands of friends. The misfortune
is that I do not know the ropes
either in Johnston or Pittsburg.

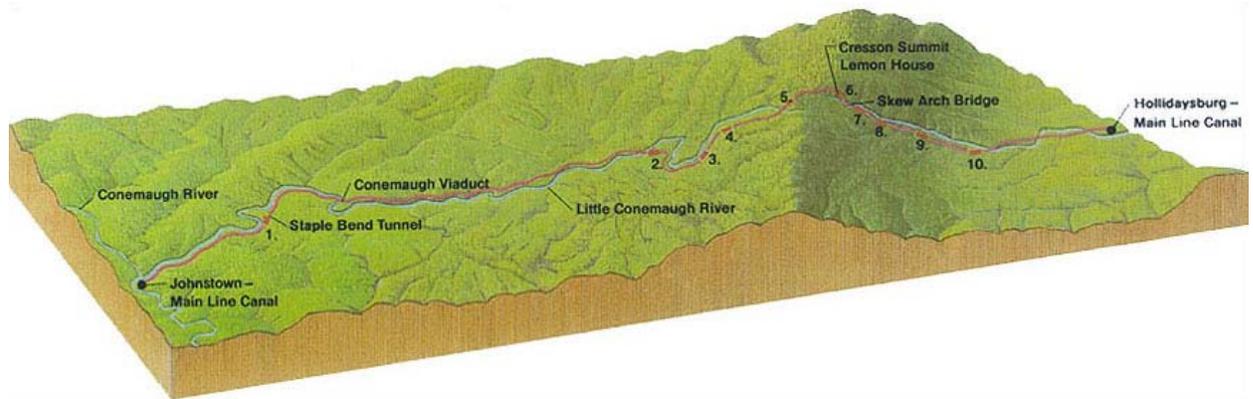
I shall be careful to compromise
no one. Write to me by the Monday's
mail. I know no one it would be safe
to write to except you, and depend
upon your advice & discretion.

In haste Yours
Lyons Elder

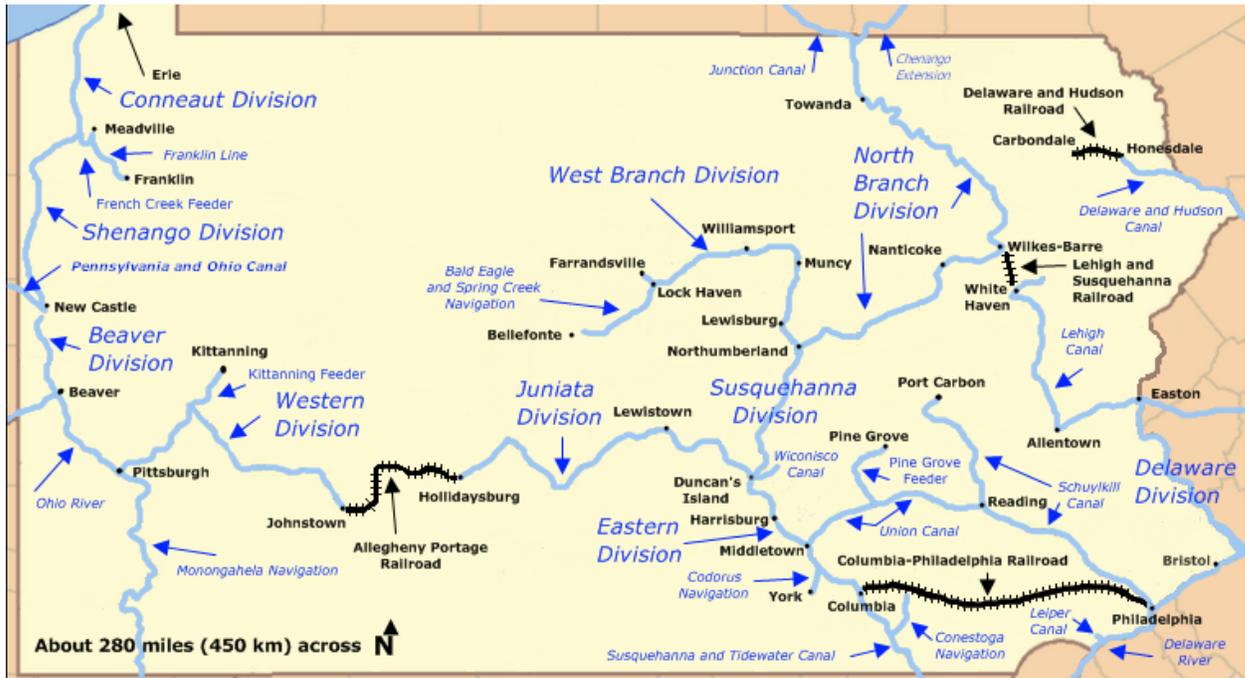


Appendix C

Schematic of the route of the Allegheny Portage Railroad



Appendix D – Map of the Main Line



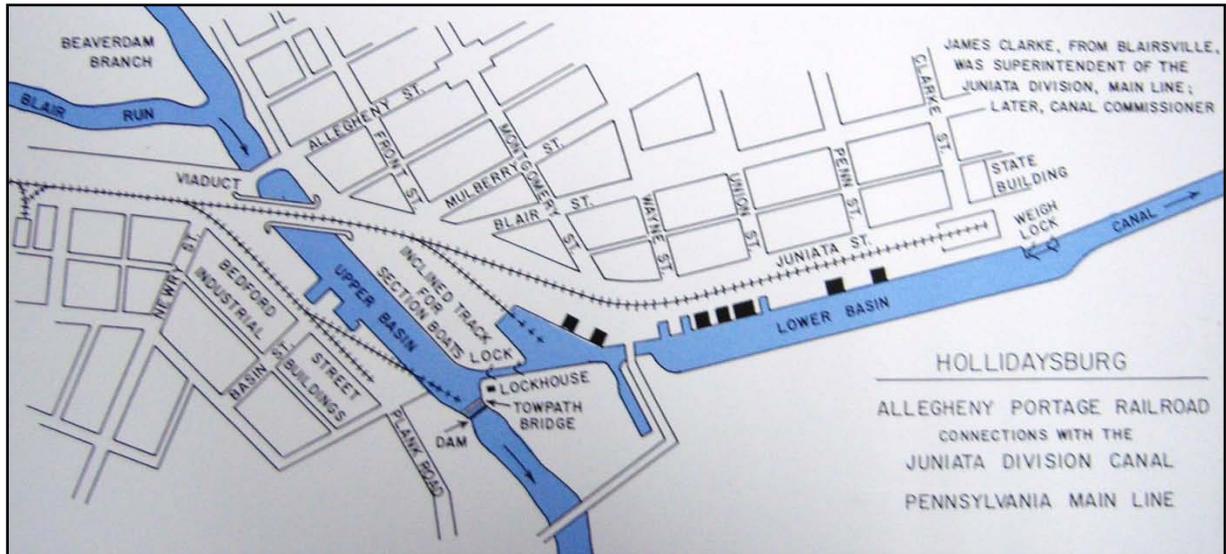
Appendix E – Hollidaysburg Canal Basin



Appendix F – Hollidaysburg – Track in approximate location of Jacob Green/James Parsons Incident



Appendix G – Map of Hollidaysburg Canal Basin



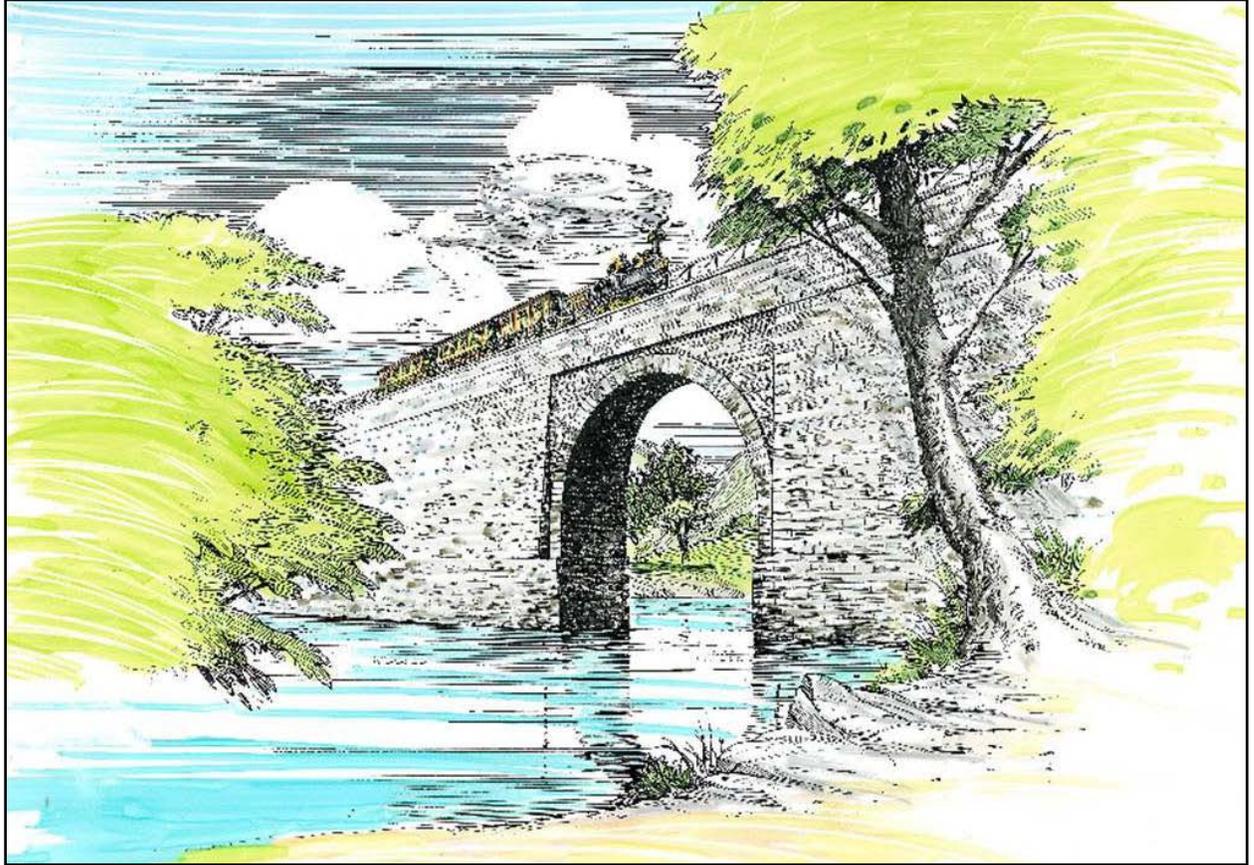
Appendix H – Level 6 Engine House and track (reconstruction) – see map on Appendix C



Appendix I – The Lemon House



Appendix J – Sketch of Conemaugh Viaduct



Appendix K – Staple Bend Tunnel



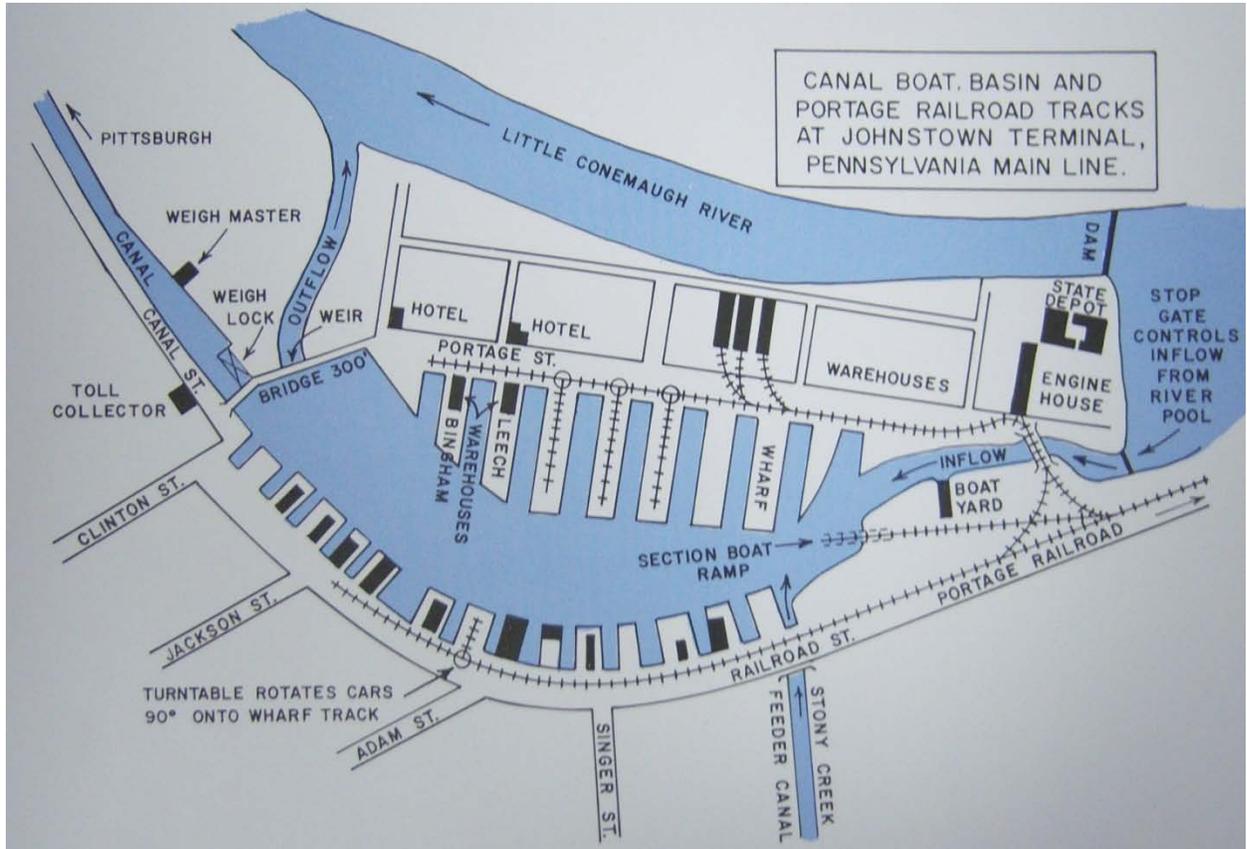
Appendix L –Sketch of canal boat on portage railroad



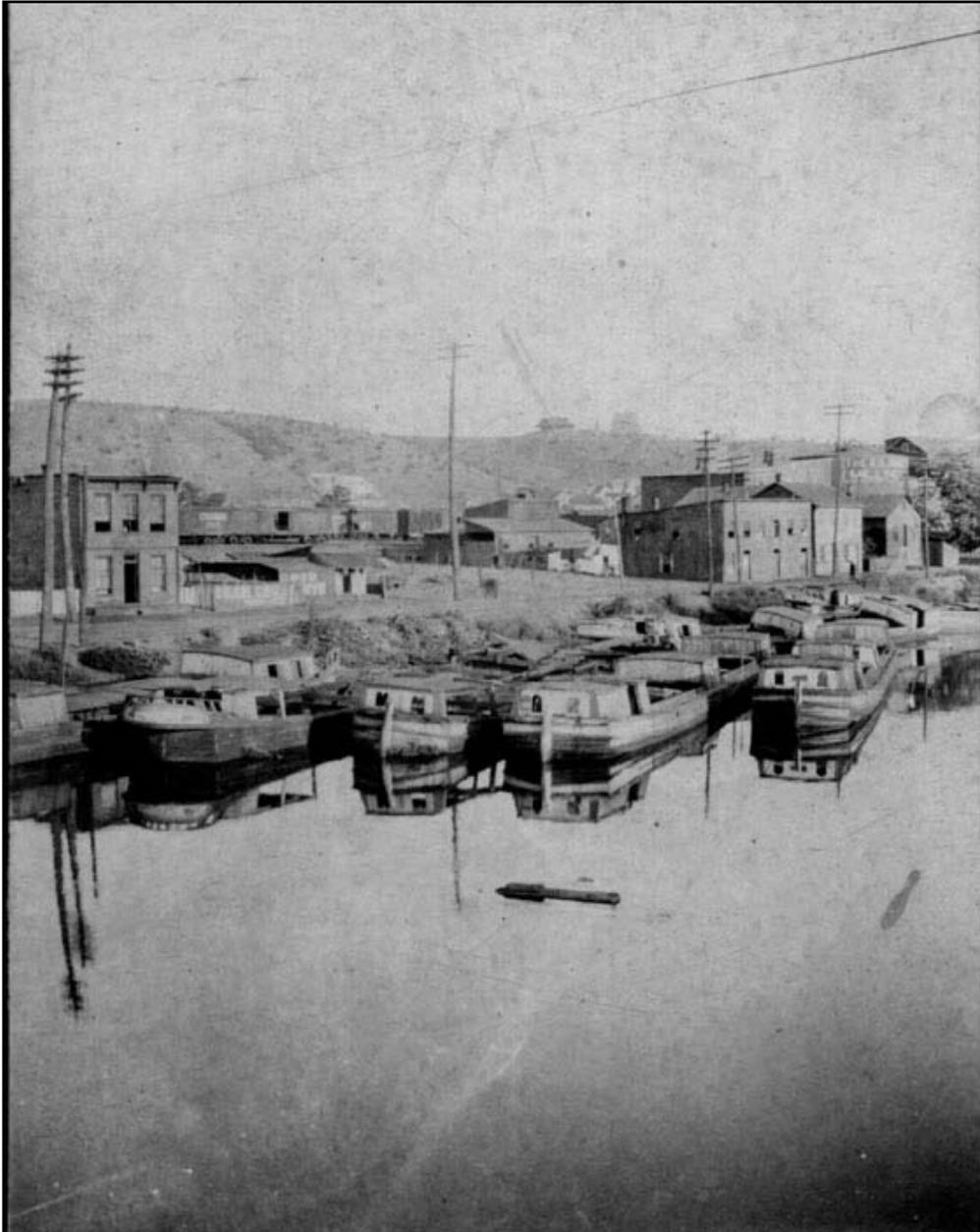
Appendix M – Original Allegheny Portage Railroad Stone Sleepers - supports for tracks



Appendix N – Sketch of Johnstown Canal Basin



Appendix O – Photo of Johnstown Canal Basin



Appendix P – Illustration of Johnstown Aqueduct



Appendix Q – Illustration of Johnstown Weighlock



S8. Describe any local, state, or federal historic designation, records, signage, or plaques at the site.

Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site was authorized as a unit of the National Park Service in 1964. The park preserves portions of the first railroad crossing of the Allegheny Mountains. This unique railroad connected the eastern and western divisions of the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal and was the main transportation route across Pennsylvania from 1834 to 1854.

There are not currently any designation or plaques related to the Underground Railroad at the site.

S9. Is the site open to the public? Describe accessibility conditions. The Summit Level unit of the park, which includes the park visitor center, Engine House and Lemon House is open to the public every day except federal holidays in the winter months. The visitor center which includes exhibits, a film and restrooms is staffed by park rangers 9 AM to 5 PM. Facilities are wheel-chair accessible.

The Staple Bend Tunnel unit of the park includes a trail available to hikers and bicycles in the summer months. The trail is usually snow-covered most of the winter and is open to cross country skiers. There are restrooms at the trailhead.

For a complete description of programs and facilities visit the park website at www.nps.gov/alpo.

S10. Describe the nature and objectives of any partnerships that have contributed to the documentation, preservation, commemoration, or interpretation of the site.

Research for this application was conducted in cooperation with a number of individuals. Their names and affiliations are listed below.

Elizabeth Bartholow
Research Intern
Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site
110 Federal Park Road
Gallitzin, PA 16641

Doug Bosley
Park Ranger
Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site
110 Federal Park Road
Gallitzin, PA 16641

Harriett Gaston
DUS Multicultural Programs Counselor
Penn State Altoona
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Patrick Trimble
Research Volunteer
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PO Box 363
Dawson, PA 15428

Barbara Zaborowski, Ph.D.
Associate Dean of Learning Resources
Pennsylvania Highlands Community College
101 Community College Way
Johnstown, PA 15904



814-262-6425

S11. Additional data or comments. (Optional)

United States Department of the Interior



National Park Service
Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site
Johnstown Flood National Memorial
110 Federal Park Road
Gallitzin, PA 16641



A22 (4130)

January 15, 2011

Ms. Sheri Jackson
Northeast Regional Program Manager
National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom
National Park Service
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Ms. Jackson:

As manager of the Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site, I consent to its inclusion in the National Park Service National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

As a public facility, the address, phone number, email and website are a matter of public record. I encourage the dissemination of this information to anyone engaged in research on the Underground Railroad or for the purposes of receiving newsletters, announcements of events or research inquiries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Keith E. Newlin".

Keith E. Newlin
Superintendent
Western Pennsylvania National Parks

TAKE PRIDE
IN AMERICA 

