

THE CONDUCTOR

MARCH 2002

NATIONAL SCENE

FY 02 Community Grants Provided by Congress

Thanks to support from the Delaware congressional delegation, the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom has been allocated \$500,00 for community grants, of which \$250,000 will go to the Underground Railroad Coalition of Delaware. This additional responsibility means that the committee of regional coordinators will set up guidelines for award of the grants quickly in order to award the money before the end of the fiscal year. A minimum requirement for application will be membership in the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom (The next application deadline is July 15).

Regional Gatherings

Links between regions grow. In September, an Underground Railroad Gathering was held for Baltimore City and Baltimore County at Goucher College, drawing together the Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation (Baltimore), the Baltimore County Zoning Agency, the Maryland Historical Society, and private tour givers. Dr. Steve Whitman, Mount St. Mary's College, (author of a forthcoming book on abolition and UGRR in MD) provided historical background, and there was a panel on UGRR tourism. In December, Richmond hosted its first gathering at the Virginia Historical Society. Represented were the VA SHPO, the VA State Library, the Black History Museum, and various groups from Northern Virginia. The speaker was historian Dr. Philip Schwarz, VA Commonwealth University, who has researched antislavery Virginians and enslaved breakers of the law. In November, Delaware held its first gathering in Wilmington at the Delaware Historical Society, drawing folks from MD and DC, as well as DE. The new film "Whisper of Angels" (recently on PBS) highlighting Delaware's role in UGRR was proudly presented.

As a result of the networking at such meetings, cross-regional stories of escape via maritime trading vessels are emerging. Delaware schooner captains like Captain William D. Bayliss of the *Keziah*, Captain Fountain of the *City of Richmond*, and Captain William Lambdin smuggled runaways from Norfolk, Richmond, or Portsmouth to the north -- Philadelphia, New Bedford, or New York. Because Lambdin and Bayliss were eventually caught and sent to the VA penitentiary in Richmond, the prison census and court records provide valuable information in addition to William Still's [The Underground Railroad](#).

NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

NCR Parks Apply to National Network to Freedom

In the latest round (January 15), four NCR parks have applied to the Network: Arlington House, Ferry Hill (C&O Canal), Antietam, and Harpers Ferry. These parks exemplify different types of properties and programs which are eligible to apply. Arlington House and Ferry Hill exemplify sites of slavery from which or through which freedom seekers passed. Such sites are the beginning of the story of escape. Antietam is closely connected with national policy, with the Emancipation Proclamation; it was the battle providing Lincoln with the victory necessary to issue the proclamation. Harpers Ferry is associated with various incidents of runaways and assistance to freedom seekers by black boatmen; its most famous association, of course, is with John Brown's raid, intended to ignite an insurrection of those enslaved in the south.

Hilary Russell's Study of DC UGRR Completed

Hilary Russell has completed her study of the Underground Railroad in Washington, D.C, officially entitled: Final Research Report: The Operation of the Underground Railroad in Washington, D.C. c. 1800-1860. It was the product of a cooperative agreement between the Historical Society of Washington (HSW) and the National Park Service. Copies of her report for the National Park Service are available in area libraries (e.g., MLK's Washingtoniana Room, Moorland-Spingarn, HSW, NCR parks). Based on this study, Hilary Russell wrote a recent article in the HSW magazine. The report includes: an extensive annotated bibliography; a review of circuit records; runaway ads so far documented; profiles of antebellum African American institutions; and biographical sketches of white and African American leaders and activists.

The report is an invaluable resource. For example, records of the US Circuit Court of DC in the National Archives (RG 21) offer details on routes of escape, transportation companies unwittingly serving as a means of escape, and persons acquitted of abetting escape. There is an ongoing project at the National Archives, indexing "Legal Affairs of Black Washingtonians", so far covering 1801-1840s. Also identified is an 8 volume index to runaway ads by Joan Dixon, National Intelligencer & Washington Advertiser Newspaper Abstracts, covering 1800-1829.

Ferry Hill HRS by Max Grivno Reveals UGRR Link

In 1813 John Blackford purchased his father-in-law's lands near a ferry and in 1839 obtained his own interests in the ferry, in addition to those of his wife. As the economy of Washington County, MD, expanded, Blackford's Ferry, operated by the owner of Ferry Hill, carried farm products and livestock between VA and MD. Barges travelling the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal passed the plantation, making it an important place for travel and commerce. The owners of Ferry Hill Place made it a model of progressive agriculture, and supported canal and turnpike schemes. By 1829 Blackford had built Ferry Hill Place, described in glowing accounts, and, by the 1830s, he had converted Ferry House into a tavern and boarding house. Slavery did not dominate the lower Shenandoah Valley where agriculture was diversified with cereals, garden crops, and livestock, and where many German immigrants, disinterested in slavery, migrated. At Ferry Hill, the enslaved laborers worked in the ferry, worked on the land, and drove wagons. At the time of Colonel John Blackford's death, in 1839, there were 18 enslaved workers, of whom there were six adult men and four adult women. As was common in the region, the enslaved provided regular labor year-round but were supplemented by hired white and black free labor and hired enslaved labor.

The number of runaway slave advertisements in Hagerstown, MD, suggests that flight to PA, OH, or NY happened. In addition to the problems of discipline for slaveholders in MD because of the proximity of free states and a large free black population, Blackford also had to deal with having a plantation near the Potomac River, the canal, and by a ferry. Runaways often followed the rivers and canals north. James Curry, fleeing from North Carolina, wrote of his flight:

At Alexandria, I crossed the Potomac river [sic] and came to Washington where I made friends with a colored family, with whom I rested eight days. I then took the Montgomery road [sic], but, wishing to escape [illegible] and it being cloudy, I lost my course, and fell back again along the Potomac river, and traveled on the tow-path of the canal from Friday night until Sunday morning...[After an unsettling encounter with a man on horse-back] I soon entered a colored person's house on the side of the canal, where they gave me breakfast and treated me very kindly. I traveled on through Williamsport and Hagerstown, in Maryland, and, on the nineteenth day of July, about two hours before day, I crossed the line into Pennsylvania with a heart full of gratitude to God, believing that I was indeed a free man, and that now, under the protection of law, there was 'none who could molest me or make me afraid.

While apparently often lenient toward their own enslaved laborers who stayed away from work, went off to visit family, or even tried to escape, the Blackfords captured runaways belonging to others. Blackford family journals document the capture of people fleeing along the Potomac River. John Blackford captured a woman on July 29, 1829, who belonged to a slave trader named Malone; she was committed to the Hagerstown jail with the intention of returning her to her master. Franklin Blackford found 5 freedom seekers hiding near the canal on June 1, 1839:

We went down to the canal a short distance and we discovered five--one woman and a child, two girls, and one man. We arrested them and brought them to the house. Joe Knode [tenant] came up and we hitched the wagon to take them to town to have them committed to jail. We did so, the woman being pregnant and complained very much.

Soon after, Blackford collected \$200 from their master at the time of collecting the runaways at the jail.

Hello and Goodbye

As of January 15, **Gerrard Jolly**, the UGRR representative for Rock Creek Park, left NPS to work for the National Park Foundation. He not only started an UGRR program in Cuyahoga Valley NRA (OH), but created the UGRR planetarium program at the Rock Creek Nature Center. He has trained other interpreters to continue the planetarium program after his departure. He will continue to volunteer to help with the "Black Georgetown" tour and other projects.

One of only two historians in the Servicewide Intake Class of 2003, **Ed Roach** has become Prince William Forest Park's representative to the NCR UGRR Committee. He is developing a trail to connect sites significant to the people who once lived within present park boundaries. In regard to UGRR, he wants to research Batestown, a free black community in a promising location. Before joining NPS, Ed served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ukraine (1998-2000), and was County Historian in Adams County, PA. He was awarded a Master's degree in History by Indiana University (PA).

Washington Post Features the Pearl Affair

If you missed the Washington Post Magazine on February 17, 2002, you missed an excellent article on the Pearl Affair by Georgetown tour guide, Mary Kay Ricks, entitled "A Passage to Freedom." The author has tracked many of those who unsuccessfully attempted to flee to freedom on the ship the *Pearl* in 1848.

Correction

Moriba McDonald corrected the last issue in regard to the course offered by Delaware State. It is a master's program. The Cultural Resources Diversity Initiative prepared the application for the grant from the Challenge Cost Sharing Program. The grant is from WASO, not NCR.

INTERPRETERS' CORNER

Public archaeology projects have empowered communities to create and manage their role and level of participation in interpreting the past. Community participation is particularly pertinent in Prince George's County, MD, which is undergoing a transition from a semi-rural community with its roots based in plantation-based agriculture to a mainly African-American suburb of Washington, D.C. The community-based project at Northampton Slave Quarters and Archaeological Park is the collaborative effort of archaeologists, planners, a developer, and, most importantly, the descendants of Elizabeth Hawkins, an African-American born at the Northampton Plantation in the mid-19th century.

The park contains one-half acre and the foundations of two slave quarters, one of which has been reconstructed as an exhibit. Under Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission (MNCPPC), it is located in a townhouse development in Lake Arbor, one of the most affluent African-American suburbs in the US. Northampton was originally a 1000 acre tract of land granted to Thomas Sprigg in 1673 and served as the Sprigg family home until 1865 when sold to John Contee Fairfax. The Sprigg family played significant roles in MD history -- Osborn Sprigg was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention and Samuel Sprigg was state governor (1819-22).

In the 18th and 19th centuries, Northampton's primary cash crop was tobacco, making the plantation dependent upon the labor of enslaved African-Americans. The slave population at Northampton fluctuated, probably due to the booms and busts in the tobacco market. In 1752 Osborn Sprigg's estate inventory listed 35 slaves. By 1810 the estate inventory of Osborn Sprigg, Jr., listed 62 slaves and 4 free persons. Osborn Sprigg, Jr.'s will of 1814 named 19 slaves of whom 13 were to be emancipated upon his death. One slave mentioned in Sprigg's 1814 will, Robert Hawkins, was to inherit life interest in the house in which he lived, and half interest in "the Mill Field", adjacent to his dwelling. A Robert Hawkins, age 60, is listed on the 1870 census of Northampton as a "Farm Hand." Elizabeth Hawkins, 25, is listed directly below Robert as "Keeping House." Dozens of descendants of African-Americans enslaved at Northampton still live and work in the county today. Of these, 25 are descendants of Elizabeth Hawkins and actively participate in the archaeology project, ongoing since 1991. In addition to participation in excavations, several descendants have provided family papers and informal oral histories. This participation has enabled a descendant community to directly influence the way in which their family's history is interpreted in a public park.

One of the descendants, Iris McConnell, has taken on the title, family historian, and over the last 25 years has

documented some 400 descendants of Robert and Elizabeth Hawkins and their 6 children. As a result of her interest, Mrs. McConnell has become involved in various county historical organizations such as PG County Historical Society and PG County Historic Preservation Commission. She is directly involved in decision making about historic and preservation issues in the county.

Three Smith brothers born at Northampton in the late teens and early 20s of the 20th century continued to come back during summers prior to WWII. The oldest brother has provided informal oral histories to the archaeology program. For example, he has described how the interiors of the former slave quarters and tenant houses were organized and how living space in the two houses was divided among family members. When he and his brother were on site during excavations, discovery of a toy might jog a memory of life as a child at Northampton. Recollections were then relayed to children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren during the work and picnics on the site, truly making this a family history event.

The descendants of Elizabeth Hawkins are taking a pro-active role in obtaining funding and community support for archaeological research and for the development of the park. They have attended community meetings and written letters to county and state officials. When the park was formally dedicated in 1997 over 100 descendants attended. Several family members spoke during the ceremony about their connection to the site and how it serves as a reminder to their family and local community of PG County's ties to slavery and segregation. In October 1999 an event more profound than a typical park dedication ceremony occurred, when a private memorial service was held for the ancestors of the Hawkins family and others enslaved at Northampton. Of special significance was the inclusion of the "Calling of African and African-American Ancestors." This ritual was a family taking charge of its past.

Donald K. Creveling, Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

GOOD NEWS FOR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS!

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) offers help for beleaguered partners. Check www.neh.gov

- [Special Initiative for Local History](#), \$10,000-100,000, matching 1:1 from non-federal sources for non-profits. Preference goes to institutions with annual budgets under \$100,000 or for long-term initiatives like an endowment, permanent lecture series, continuing exhibit series, or community walking tours. Apply by May 1, 2002.

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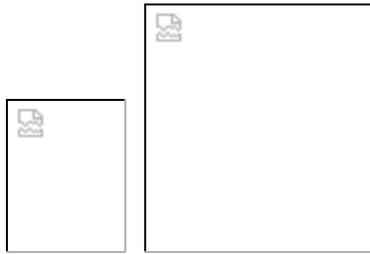
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THANKS ARE DUE: Sean Tull, Don Creveling, Fred Winter, and especially those helpful NCR UGRR Committee members who merited 2001 book awards -- Ted Alexander, Jackie Cunningham and Melinda Day

EDITOR'S NOTE

The National Capital Region Underground Railroad Committee proudly presents this electronic newsletter to educate, and to build commitment to accurate portrayal of the Underground Railroad. **Make this newsletter a forum by directing your comments and contributions to:** Jenny Masur (jenny_masur@nps.gov).



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