

Interpreting the Civil War: The New Museum and Visitor Center At Gettysburg National Military Park



Exterior view - Museum and Visitor Center at Gettysburg National Military Park

Courtesy: Gettysburg Foundation.
 photo by Bill Dowling

The National Park Service's (NPS) new \$103 million Museum and Visitor Center at Gettysburg National Military Park (GNMP) is not so much museum as it is showplace, atmospheric orientation hub, entertainment complex, and flexible exposition hall, anchored by a 5,790 square-foot books-and-souvenirs emporium and a 9,500 square-foot "Refreshment Saloon."

Beyond its eleven attention-grabbing interpretive galleries, the new center's wood-accented interior supports a two-screen cineplex with simultaneous showings of a superb twenty-two-minute feature film; spacious, dramatically lit lobbies admitting evocative rural landscapes; a licensed battlefield guide station; information and ticketing counters; an orientation theater; and much more. The effect is of a warmer, semi-Disneyfied, and genteelly rusticated version of the Colonial Williamsburg Visitor Center, leading edge at its mid-1950s debut.

The center also houses NPS's stellar collection of a million Civil War relics (rarely more than ten percent of them on view at one time), the Ford Motor Company Fund Education Center, and staff offices. Still under construction is the Cyclorama Gallery, putatively the heart

and soul of the center. This *pièce de résistance* will include the \$16 million restoration of Paul Philippoteaux's iconic seven-ton, 277-foot Pickett's Charge painting in-the-round and accompanying exhibits, scheduled for a September 2008, "Grand Opening." Expanded parking facilities, enhanced disability access, and a woodland amphitheatre are also under development. No pains appear to have been spared on any level.

Why, one might ask, this expensive new center, a third of its cost paid by taxpayers, when GNMP already had a world-class visitor center and the truly visionary Cyclorama Center designed by internationally recognized architects Richard Neutra and Robert Alexander? Adjacent to the Soldiers' National Cemetery and the 1962 Cyclorama, the previous visitor center, more than eighty years old, could no longer accommodate burgeoning annual attendance of over 1.5 million nor adequately conserve NPS's artifact collection. The move to create the new center derived from a mission of at least fourteen years' standing within the park; its key goals include preservation of the park's artifacts; restoration, preservation, and proper display of the Cyclorama; generation of increased revenues to support the maintenance of the historic battlefield; and enhancement of the heritage tourism economies of the town of Gettysburg and Adams County.

Of singular importance, however, was the goal of developing a new interpretation of the Battle of Gettysburg in the context of the entire Civil War and its times, including a focus on the lot of the common soldier; and concomitantly, one that is compatible with a generation of new scholarship and

curatorial trends, most notably an emphasis on slavery as the key cause of the war – this to counterbalance the older narrative of reconciliation, which emphasized "the uniquely American" valor of both Union and Confederate soldiers.

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A new, state-of-the-art visitor facility could go far in accomplishing these goals. It could also enhance access to and popularity of “the Gettysburg experience” for a larger, more diverse audience. Finally, planners recognized that a growing number of Americans know little if anything about the Civil War, including in which century it occurred, even less about the Battle of Gettysburg. A new interpretive

facility could thus serve a broadly educational function, informing visitors about the continuing significance of the war.

Grouped in five major, labyrinthine sections (Impact, Causes, and Approach to War, The Civil War 1861-65, and the Campaign to Pennsylvania), the eleven museum galleries, operatic in scale, drive the center’s overall interpretive agenda. Lush, twenty-foot high graphics and powerful quotations inspire awe, even as the winding trail through the eerily lit museum conveys the war’s sheer magnitude. Each gallery is keyed to a phrase from Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address: e.g. “Conceived in Liberty?” (note the added question mark) considers slavery; “Testing

Nonetheless, by its own definition of how properly to interpret the Civil War, the new center prevails, of course—for now. The story of slavery, like that of the mid-twentieth century European Holocaust, must be repeatedly and publicly told. The center pulses with a dignified integrity, albeit suffused with horrid images and recollections of human and animal depredation. But in attempting to redress the longstanding imbalance between slavery as the war’s cause, on one hand, and the narrative of reconciliation, on the other, the irresistible (free!) museum galleries and the inspirational feature film (\$8) perpetuate, paradoxically, America’s nineteenth century style of consuming political debate and rhetorical sentimentality. They also risk recharging, for our own time, the dynamos of denial and avoidance by neglecting certain other key propellants—behavioral, societal, moral, theological, psychological—for men fighting here.

Nonetheless, the NPS and its private partner, Gettysburg Battlefield Foundation, who have together received considerable public condemnation from those favoring the traditional “guts and glory” view of the war, should be commended, in this case, for *not* sticking to their guns. Moreover, the lofty yet basic box-store interior space of the new museum and center is a staging ground of infinite possibilities. Indeed, its very flexibility is one of its planners’ wisest bequests. There is ample room for new interpretations, for another age.

Admittedly, this ambitious project has been beleaguered by incessant controversy, lawsuits, and battles among various local and national constituencies. Most significant of these, currently, is the proposed demolition of the beloved Neutra Cyclorama, its fate still awaiting the outcome of a federal lawsuit. Have all the brouhaha surrounding the new center and chunks of taxpayers’ money expended on it been worth it? Absolutely. The details and much of the whole bespeak a genius of enlightened intelligence. Besides, is it not preferable to fight wars on table tops, in exhibit cases, and with paint and brushes on museum walls than in fields and skies with live ammunition?

George Muschamp, Ph.D. is adjunct assistant professor of theatre arts and speech at Gettysburg College, founding member and former producing artistic director of the Gettysburg Theatre Festival, and production director and theatre manager/line producer for the Gettysburg Arts Festival 2008, *Celebrating America*. ❖

EXPLORING THE MID@LANTIC

Gettysburg National Military Park’s official Web site is at

<http://www.nps.gov/getts/>

In addition to information about visiting the Park, the site includes background on the park and the battle it commemorates, detailed discussion of the new Museum and Visitor Center, primary sources, curriculum material on the meaning of the battle for the town’s African American residents, and a bibliography.

The National Park Service’s official Civil War Web site is at

<http://cwar.nps.gov/civilwar/civilwar.htm>.

It is rich with information about the Civil War, sites within NPS that commemorate the war, and NPS’s Civil War Sesquicentennial Initiative. Highlights include a computerized data base of information on both Northern and Southern soldiers; and detailed information about African American soldiers and civilians during the war.

President Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address is the subject of two excellent Web sites:

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/gadd/>

Library of Congress site with full text and commentary on several drafts of the Address;

<http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=36>

A page on the 100 Milestone Documents Web site, a cooperative effort of National History Day, The National Archives and Records Administration, and USA Freedom Corps; includes teaching resources.

Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Web sites are dedicated to the American Civil War. Here are two excellent gateway sites; both are well organized, easy to navigate, and frequently updated:

<http://www.homepages.dsu.edu/~jankej/civilwar/civilwar.htm>

The American Civil War

<http://sunsite.utk.edu/civil-war/>

The American Civil War Homepage

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Interior view - Museum and Visitor Center at Gettysburg National Military Park

Courtesy: Gettysburg Foundation; photo by Bill Downing

Whether That Nation,” is about the invasion of Pennsylvania; “That These Dead Shall Not Have Died in Vain,” about slavery’s end, the union recreated. Individual guests have reportedly become disoriented and even momentarily lost in these shadowy chambers, which yet offer many interactive learning opportunities (along with strategically placed benches and several refreshing window vistas). Kids especially appear to delight in the rambling, chock-a-block feel and inviting, go-at-your-own-pace mood of the galleries, rather like being in grandma’s attic.

However, the new center gives such a superabundance of context about the *entire war* that one can come away from easily three hours or more of films and exhibits musing, “Well, this is just wonderful! But, wait a minute: where’s Gettysburg?” Gettysburg’s strategic location and topographic features, essential to an understanding of *this* battle, are ignored. But perhaps that is the point. Do the center’s designers intend to convey the notion that Gettysburg and the Civil War are synonymous?

FEATURED RESOURCE

Tools for Teaching about Tolerance

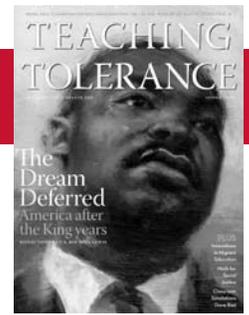
Cross Ties readers will recall that the last issue featured projects designed to stimulate public dialogue about the legacy of 1960s racial disturbances in two mid-Atlantic cities: *What's Going On? Newark and the Legacy of the Sixties*, an exhibit at The New Jersey Historical Society in Newark; and Baltimore '68: Riots and Rebirth, a multi-faceted public history project developed by the University of Baltimore. Here we note two resources that educators and program planners may find useful for addressing issues of diversity and tolerance.

Teaching Tolerance, a project of the Southern Poverty Law Center, provides educators, activists, parents, and youth with materials that promote respect for differences in the classroom, community, and home. Among the resources it makes available at no cost are curriculum kits

and the biannual magazine, *Teaching Tolerance*, and an award-winning Web site, www.tolerance.org, rich with information and ideas aimed at "dismantling bigotry and creating communities that value diversity." The project also awards grants in two categories: for pre-K-12 teachers, community organizations, and houses of worship, grants of up to \$2,500 for initiatives that support efforts to reduce prejudice among young people, improve intergroup relations in schools, and/or support educator professional development in these areas; and for individual schools and school districts, grants of up to \$10,000 for collaborative projects aimed at equalizing students' experiences in schools and promoting social justice.

Facing History and Ourselves, an educational organization headquartered in

Massachusetts with a significant presence in New York and several other cities around the country, seeks to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an historical examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism, so that they may make the connection between what happened in the past and the choices they confront in their own lives. Facing History offers a variety of professional development services, including workshops, seminars, and an on-line campus; and curriculum resources. It also supports community events that encourage civic engagement, individual and collective responsibility for a humane civic culture, and tolerance. For further information, go to: <http://www.facinghistory.org> ✖



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the cover of the Spring 2008 *Teaching Tolerance* magazine.

© 2007 Teaching Tolerance. Image by Jerome Langertine

GOING TO THE WELL

Digitization at the National Archives and Records Administration

As Cross Ties readers consider entering into partnerships with external organizations to digitize their collections, they may be especially interested in the principles established by the National Archives and Records Administration to govern such partnerships. —Ed.

With more than ten billion pages in the holdings of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), digitizing and providing on-line access to even a small percentage of these materials presents an enormous challenge. NARA is facing this challenge with a comprehensive digitization plan, codified as "Strategy for Digitizing Archival Materials for Public Access" and supported by a number of innovative projects.

The plan outlines five strategies for digitizing copies of NARA's records to meet both public access and records preservation needs. These strategies include projects that the National Archives must do itself, such as gathering together for publication on the Web digitized materials already created within the agency and conducting internal digitization projects for fragile, high-interest, or otherwise high-risk materials. See <http://archives.gov/digitization/plan.html>.

NARA's strategies also include establishing partnerships with organizations in the private and public sectors to work with it to digitize and make available holdings on-line. For example, in 2007, NARA initiated a partnership with Footnote (www.footnote.com) that to date has resulted in more than twenty-eight million digital copies of NARA's holdings made available on-line. Several other partnerships are underway, listed at:

<http://www.archives.gov/digitization/partnerships.html>.

The National Archives follows a number of important principles to ensure preservation of and open access to holdings that are digitized by partners. These include:

- Partnerships must be non-exclusive, that is, NARA will not seek a single partner to digitize all of the holdings, but will consider different partners for different sets of materials.
- The partner must digitize a full series. It is important that NARA be able to assure researchers that all the records in a particular series are available on-line so there is no further need to review the original records.

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Among materials digitized by NARA is this poster, "Plan Today Build Tomorrow With War Bonds Through Pay Roll Savings." From the series World War II posters, 1942-1945, Office of Government Reports.

Courtesy: National Archives and Records Administration

PROJECTS TO WATCH



During 2009, New York City and New York State will celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of Henry Hudson's and Samuel de Champlain's first journeys along the bodies of water that bear their names, as well as the two hundredth anniversary of the advent of steam powered commerce on the Hudson. A similar celebration in 1909 sparked natural and historic preservation efforts, including the creation of Bear Mountain and Harriman state parks and the restoration of Fort Ticonderoga. For further information, visit www.exploreny400.com.

Camden, New Jersey's cultural prospects have lifted with the launch of a community-based theater and a museum of maritime history, both in the beleaguered South Camden neighborhood compromised by widespread environmental degradation. The ninety-seat **Waterfront South Theater**, set to open in 2009, is the work of playwright **Joe Paprzycki**. It is located on the site of the bar his grandfather operated until the nearby New York Shipyard shut down in 1967. Major funding for the \$500,000 building comes from the Domenica Foundation, run by former Camden resident **Pepe Piperno**. The **Camden Shipyard and Maritime Museum** is under development in what had formerly been the Episcopal Church of Our Savior, guided by former Rutgers-Camden urban studies professor **Michael Lang**. The intent is to combine exhibits with opportunities for recreational boating.

The Graduate Center of the City University of New York has announced formation of a new graduate center for biography, named for its chief benefactor, **Leon Levy**. Award-winning biographers and CUNY faculty members **Nancy Milford** and **David Nasaw** will serve as executive director and faculty codirector of the center, respectively. Seeking to build connections between university-affiliated and independent biographers working in print, film, visual

arts, and new media and across academic disciplines, the center will provide fellowships starting this fall and support an annual international conference.

Also this fall, **The Oral History Research Office at Columbia University**, in partnership with the university's **Institute for Social and Economic Research Policy**, will initiate the first graduate program in oral history in the United States. The **Oral History Masters of Arts** is an interdisciplinary program linking social science and humanities research and focusing on interviewing methodologies and interpretive methods. For further information, go to <http://www.iserp.columbia.edu/education/ohma.html>.

New Jersey's **Crossroads of the American Revolution National and State Heritage Area**, a fourteen-county collaborative seeking to raise popular understanding of New Jersey's Revolutionary War heritage, has been awarded \$147,600



Crossroads of the American Revolution Association

in matching funds from the National Park Service. The first federal funding received by Crossroads, it will be used to support a two- to three-year planning process involving a broad base of stakeholders, including professional historians, history buffs, environmentalists, governing officials, educators, and the interested public. For further information, go to <http://www.revolutionarynj.org/index.php>.

Among the first **Transatlantic Digitization Collaboration Grants** awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities' newly created Office of Digital Humanities is the **Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University**, working in collaboration with the Centre for Computing in the Humanities at King's College, London. Funding will support the launch of Concordia, a set of tools and procedures to enable seamless textual searches and the dynamic mapping of a variety of humanities collections. ❖

Going to the Well, continued from page 3

- The partner must provide free access to its Web site in NARA's research rooms across the country.
- The partner must donate digitized images and metadata to NARA. It must agree to allow NARA to use the metadata immediately to link to the images from the Archival Research Catalog (see ARC at <http://www.archives.gov/research/arc/index.html>). After an agreed upon period of time, it must also allow NARA unrestricted use

of the digitized materials including the right to provide free on-line access to the images.

- The partner must provide images that meet NARA's technical standards and the descriptive metadata provided to NARA must be mutually agreed upon.
- The partner must pay for document preparation, metadata creation, project monitoring, and pulling and refileing the holdings.

- NARA must provide project management.

NARA is unique among government agencies in that it is charged with making the government's historical information available to the public. By creating a comprehensive digitization plan and implementing innovative strategies, including working with partners, NARA is striving to vastly increase public access to its holdings.

Pamela Wright, Archival Research Catalog (ARC) Project Manager, National Archives and Records Administration ❖

MARCH HAPPENINGS

At its annual meeting, held this year in conjunction with the Fredric M. Miller Memorial Lecture on April 17 in Camden, MARCH's Advisory Council explored new roles for itself in creating a sustaining structure for MARCH. Council members agreed to cosponsor a series of information gathering sessions in the coming year to help MARCH determine how best to serve its constituents. Preliminary plans include meetings in Pittsburgh, Albany, and New Jersey, as well as other locations. Members of the council also proposed extending MARCH's work with students enrolled in public history degree programs, with an eye toward finding new ways to prepare aspiring humanities professionals to meet the severe economic and methodological challenges facing the field. More information on both initiatives will follow in these pages and through e-mail announcements.

Advisory Council member **Martin E. Sullivan** has been appointed director of the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery. He joins the Smithsonian after nearly a decade as chief operating officer of the St. Mary's City Commission in Maryland. Previously he served as director of the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, and the New York State Museum in Albany.

Amey Senape, cofounder of Save Our Steel in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, completed her master's degree in public history at Lehigh University this spring. Senape began her studies in 2004 as a Community Fellow supported by MARCH, the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor, and Historic Bethlehem Partnership. MARCH's involvement helped Senape craft a thesis, "Redevelopment of the Bethlehem Steel Site: A Public History Perspective," which testifies to the value of integrating scholarship and community work with site interpretation.

In April, MARCH Director of Programs **Sharon Ann Holt** contributed to a public forum at Lehigh University on the future of the city of Bethlehem and to a conference session on the President's House memorial in Philadelphia at the National Council on Public History's annual meeting in Lexington, Kentucky. She also published a review in *Curator* magazine about the impact of historic preservation on art display at the Philadelphia Museum of Art's new Perelman Building.

Cross Ties guest editor **Linda Shopes** is co-editor, with Paula Hamilton, of a book just released by Temple University Press, *Oral History and Public Memories*. Examining how oral history both reflects and shapes collective memory, this collection of fourteen original essays looks at oral history as a social practice that connects the past with contemporary cultural work. ✕

REGIONAL ROUNDUP



Courtesy Phoebe Stein Davis; photo by Eileen Molony

Dr. Phoebe Stein Davis has been appointed executive director of the Maryland Humanities Council; she will assume duties in July. For the past several years, Dr. Davis has served as a senior administrator with the Illinois Humanities Council, where she developed statewide programs and increased the Council's national visibility.

Morris Vogel has been named president of the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City, succeeding **Ruth J. Abram**, the museum's founding president. A long-time member of Temple University's history faculty, Vogel served as the first project director for the NEH challenge grant that launched MARCH. In addition to playing an active role in many cultural organizations in Philadelphia, Vogel served as director of the Arts and Culture Division of the Rockefeller Foundation from 2004 to 2006.

Lucienne Beard recently became director of education and outreach, a new position at the Foundations of the Union League in Philadelphia. She comes with experience as director of education

at Cliveden in Philadelphia's Germantown neighborhood and as program director at the Alice Paul Institute in Mount Laurel, New Jersey. The Foundations of the Union League oversee the League's art and history collections and provide leadership development and scholarship programs for Delaware Valley youth.

Dorothy P. Guzzo assumed the position of director of the New Jersey Historic Trust in February, succeeding MARCH Advisory Council member **Barbara Irvine**. Guzzo leaves her position as deputy state preservation officer in the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.



Courtesy New Jersey Department of Community Affairs; photo by Jamie Chong

Eight Philadelphia area cultural organizations have been awarded more than \$1 million in grants from the **Heritage Philadelphia Program**, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. Grantees include the **Rosenbach Museum and Library** for creation of a Web site and blog, "21st Century Abe," designed to draw young people into active interpretation of Abraham Lincoln's legacy on the occasion of the bicentennial of his birth in 2009; and the **Preservation**

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The Valley of the Shadow, a digital archive of material about Augusta County, Virginia, and Franklin County, Pennsylvania, during the Civil War, was path breaking in its use of the Web to gather together, organize, and make widely accessible diverse primary sources on a single topic. It is at :

<http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/>

Additional archival material is available at: <http://dewey.library.upenn.edu/sceti/civilwar/> The Crisis of the Union: An Electronic Archive of Documents about the Causes, Conduct, and Consequences of the U.S. Civil War

<http://memory.loc.gov/>

American Memory Project at the Library of Congress; an "American Civil War" search on the site returns some five thousand items.

<http://www.musarium.com/eyeofthestorm/main.html>

Eye of the Storm – drawings, maps, and journal entries of Private Robert Sneden of the 40th New York Volunteers

<http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/7milVol/>

Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War, published in 1865, includes a section on Battle of Gettysburg.

http://library.morrisville.edu/local_history/civil_war/

Civil War Letters of Galutia York, of Company G 114th New York State Volunteer Infantry

Sites of particular interest to educators, with primary documents, contextual essays, lesson plans, and other materials, include:

http://www.civilwar.org/historyclassroom/hc_lesplanact.htm

Lesson Plans for Civil War History, by The Civil War Preservation Trust

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/civil-war-reconstruction.html>

Teaching with Documents: Civil War and Reconstruction, by the National Archives and Records Administration

www.nps.gov/nr//twhp/civwar00.htm

Teaching with Historic Places: Civil War Lesson Plans, by the National Park Service; includes Choices and Commitments: The Soldiers at Gettysburg

<http://www.gilderlehrman.org/teachers/modules.html>

Links to materials on the coming of the Civil War, the War, and Reconstruction, by the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History http://free.ed.gov/subjects.cfm?subject_id=137

Links to 48 Civil War related resources, by Free Federal Resources for Educational Excellence

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lincolns/> The Time of the Lincolns, by PBS

Regional Roundup, continued from page 5

Alliance of Greater Philadelphia, for the development of the city's first preservation plan and historic resources survey. Additional awardees are the **Samuel S. Fleisher Art Memorial**, **Pearl S. Buck International**, **The Village of Arts and Humanities**, and **West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance** for preservation programs; and **The Fairmount Park Art Association** and **Philadelphia Mural Arts Program** for arts and culture programs.



The **Delaware Historical Society** has changed its name (from Historical Society of Delaware) and adopted a new look as part of a rebranding effort to raise visibility and reach more constituents. The three stars on the new logo represent each of the state's counties; the receding double line underscoring "Delaware" represents both the stroke of the quill pen that made Delaware the First State and movement across the state into the indefinite future. The words accompanying these symbols suggest that the Society exists to help people *discover* answers, *explore* their meaning, and share their stories.

New Jersey History, founded as the *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* in 1845 and published under the auspices of the Society until 2005, will be relaunched under the editorial direction of historians at the New Jersey Historical Commission, Kean University, and the Society. The first issue of what will be a biannual publication is planned for early 2009. The editorial staff, including **Peter Mickulas** of the Commission and **Terry Golway** of Kean University, is soliciting scholarly articles aimed at a nonspecialized audience. The editors welcome work in all disciplines—law, literature, political science, anthropology, archaeology, material culture, cultural studies, and social and political history—bearing on any aspects of New Jersey's history. They are also interested in

documents, photographs, and other primary source material that could be published with annotations. Direct inquiries to *peter.mickulas@sos.state.nj.us*



The **Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor's** Preservation and Management Plan has received the American Planning Association's prestigious Daniel Burnham Award for a Comprehensive Plan for 2008. The Corridor encompasses the structures, stories, waterways, and trails along upstate New York's historic system of canals. The award recognizes the plan's innovative linking of historic preservation to community development and heritage tourism. For further information, go to <http://www.eriecanalway.org/>.



Kyakers along the Erie Canal, near the restored Pittsford, NY Flour Mill

Courtesy: Erie Canalway, National Park Service; photo by Joe Carey

The Contemporary Museum in Baltimore has launched *The Story of This Place: Charm City Remix*, a set of audio walking tours by Boston-based artist Kianga Ford. Rooted in place and informed by Baltimore's diverse history, the tours are structured around fictional narratives developed from the stories local residents shared with Ford during her residency at the Contemporary during the past year. For further information and to download the tours, go to: <http://www.contemporary.org/kiangafordfile.php> ☒

FAMOUS LAST WORDS JUDITH WELLMAN



Documenting the Underground Railroad in New York

Americans—whether African Americans or people of other ethnic backgrounds—are fascinated by the Underground Railroad (UGRR). They are attracted, of course, by its inherent mystery: Who were these people who escaped from slavery? How did they do it? And how can we document this supposedly secret movement? Yet the Underground Railroad is far more than a historical detective story. It speaks to essential American values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all. Commemorating the Underground Railroad also offers opportunities for economic development through historic preservation and heritage tourism.

In the past decade, Underground Railroad research has taken a quantum leap forward, spurred by creation of the National Park Service's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program; the development of the Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati; several state and regional initiatives; and especially by the passionate concern of local historians, historic preservationists, genealogists, and citizens.

All efforts to preserve and interpret Underground Railroad sites, including nominations to the National Register of Historic Places and the Network to Freedom, tourism trails, signage, museum exhibits, curriculum units, articles, books, and websites, depend on solid research in primary documents. But many people are skeptical: How, they ask, can we document the Underground Railroad? Was it not a secret movement? Are not our only sources oral traditions?

Of all the myths relating to the Underground Railroad—about tunnels, quilts, hiding



Home of William R. and Eliza Smith, who aided Mary and Emily Edmondson escape from slavery in 1848 and helped raise bail for UGRR agent William Chaplin when he was captured in Maryland in 1850.

© Historical New York Research Associates: photo by Judith Wellman

places, destinations, types of people who traveled North, and so forth—the myth of secrecy is among the most pervasive. At some places and times, the Underground Railroad was indeed a secret movement. At other times and places, however, it was very open and widely discussed. And many primary sources exist, written by people actually involved in this movement.

Between 1999 and 2008, the Preservation League of New York State and the New York State Council on the Arts funded five countywide studies (for Oswego, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Wayne counties) to identify and commemorate sites relating to the Underground Railroad, abolitionism, and African American life in central New York. These surveys began with certain basic assumptions:

- 1) The UGRR began with people who escaped from slavery.** Their stories lie at the heart of this documentation project. Not only safe houses that sheltered freedom seekers but buildings associated with those who settled in New York State are essential to stories of the Underground Railroad.
- 2) The UGRR relied on abolitionist networks,** which included women as well as men, African Americans as well as European Americans. We therefore need to document sites relating to abolitionism and African American life, even if we do not have specific evidence that they were UGRR way stations.
- 3) Myths relating to the UGRR can be turned into hypotheses and tested by research in the extant documentary record.**

Guided by these assumptions, we organized the county surveys into three phases. In Phase I: Basic Research, we used an Excel database to cross reference information on people and places with probable/possible UGRR associations compiled from numerous primary sources, including oral traditions, memoirs, local print materials, manuscript collections, newspapers, and census records, much of it available online. We incorporated information for all African Americans listed

in census records from 1850 to 1880. Many who listed their birthplaces as a southern state, Canada, or unknown had, in fact, escaped from slavery and settled locally.

We then rated each of the several hundred names and places in our database for their probable involvement with the Underground Railroad: 1 indicated no evidence of involvement; 2, no evidence so far; 3, oral tradition of involvement, supported by documentary evidence of abolitionist sympathies or African American connections; 4, considerable evidence of involvement; and 5, conclusive evidence of involvement, firmly based on primary sources. From this, we identified a core group of one to two hundred people and places with UGRR connections, including those that we had rated 3 or 4.

In Phase II: Property Research, we used maps, deeds, and assessment records to locate sites related to our core group. In each county, we found between thirty and 120 extent sites significant enough to document further.

In Phase III: Writing, we consolidated our research, incorporating photographs, a description, and statement of significance for each site identified in Phase II. A context statement introduces each report, discussing the relationship between local stories and themes in New York and U.S. history.

So far, our work has resulted in six Web sites, nineteen successful nominations to the National Register (plus several more listed on the Register as part of historic districts), thirty-three listings on the Network to Freedom, and three tours, as well as dozens of public presentations.

The basic sources and methods I have outlined here can be used anywhere in the country. We invite you to try this in your own local area – the results can be extremely rewarding, both for researchers and local communities.

Judith Wellman, emerita professor of history at the State University of New York Oswego and principal investigator, Historical New York Research Associates, supervised these surveys of sites associated with the Underground Railroad in New York. ❖

MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Johns Hopkins University Press is pleased to announce that it will distribute books published by the Maryland Historical Society, effective January 1, 2008

NEW

A Maryland Sampling

Girlhood Embroidery 1738–1860

Gloria Seaman Allen

\$75.00 hardcover

Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake

Black and White Resistance to Human Bondage, 1775–1865

T. Stephen Whitman

\$20.00 paperback

Treasure in the Cellar

A Tale of Gold in Depression-Era Baltimore

Leonard Augsburger

\$26.00 paperback



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