



# THE CONDUCTOR

The official newsletter of  
The National Capital Region  
Network to Freedom Program

Winter 2006 Issue no. 16

## 3 President Street Station Attracts UGRR Visitors

A staff member of President Street Station in Baltimore, part of the Maryland Historical Society, reports that UGRR attracts visitors...

## 4 Reginald Lewis Museum Opens In Baltimore

If you haven't been to the new Reginald F. Lewis Museum in Baltimore, you have a treat in store...

## 4 Uncle Tom's Cabin Up For Sale

Preservationists would like to conserve a special part of Maryland's heritage. For years privately owned...

## 5 Interpreters' Corner: Hidden in Plain View

The "Underground Railroad Quilt Code" is widely disseminated in popular culture...

# Katrina Whomps Louisiana's People and Treasures



Aerial photograph of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina on the New Orleans area. Photo Courtesy of Department of Interior

With the impact of Hurricane Katrina, the US has lost valuable treasures, as well as the suffering inflicted on living generations. New Orleans was historically a hub of the slave trade, and unique for its transition from Spanish to French to American forms of enslavement. On September 21, after the hurricane, Network to

Freedom (NTF) member, the River Road African American Museum, reported no physical damage. Kathe Hambrick, the museum's founder and director pleads with friends:

"Cultural preservation begins with the people, and there are many sharing their experiences and looking for help. Relief comes in many forms...not just food, shelter and clothing. Museums and other cultural institutions can provide respite for many of the displaced people who are seeking music, art and cultural connections to their past. There are lots of opportunities being presented to artists to perform and relocate out of state and abroad. What a loss it would be."

In its mission of interpreting the

diverse cultural groups living in the Lower Mississippi Delta, Jean Lafitte NHP is important to the interpretation of the history of African Americans. On October 25, Alyssa Baltrus, JELA supervisory ranger, wrote colleagues:

"Even 8 weeks after Katrina, communication with the outside world is tough. Our network is still down and our access to the internet and iNotes is severely limited.... It is strange the things you miss and what you take for granted. One thing I will never take for granted is the whole NPS family thing!!! I appreciate all the IC folks who gave up their cozy offices and warm beds to come down and give us a hand. They were awesome - - escorting us to our homes, helping to arrange FEMA

*Continued on page 2*

*Continued from page 1*

trailers and starting the park back on the rebuilding process. In addition, so many folks offered to help from their home parks -- offering details to our folks, sending used uniforms and/or just letting us know we were in their thoughts and prayers. I'm not sure we could have gotten through this alone. So... thank you!

We are slowly getting back to some normalcy (even though our definition of normalcy has completely changed). I opened the French Quarter Visitor Center last week on a part-time M-F schedule. There was very little damage there -- a little water on the floor, a little roof damage, but nothing bad. We will probably be reclosing it in a week or two for roof repairs, but the normalcy of just being there is priceless. With no tourists here, for at least the short-term, our role has changed... we are serving more as a chamber of commerce office, helping folks (mostly FEMA and Red Cross workers) figure out what is open and ready for business. We also plan to give some talks on the history of the Quarter, the levee system, and why the flooding in the French Quarter was nothing compared to surrounding areas. We are hoping to open Chalmette Battlefield in January. There no longer is worry about the toxic substances on the battlefield (it seems they all flowed out with the receding waters), but the visitor center and park offices were destroyed, as was the cemetery and boat

docks (80% of folks visit via a boat from the French quarter). More importantly words cannot express the magnitude of the damage in the community. I have never seen anything like it; it is way worse than most of New Orleans. There is a whole train (at least eight cars) that floated into the middle of town, out of sight of the tracks. Boats are in the trees, and homes floated blocks from their foundations. Probably the most haunting thing are the numbers spray painted on the buildings...#rescued, #dead, #of pets left, date building cleared... Compared to the rest of the parish, the battlefield looks like an oasis... a mirage, thanks to the hundreds of IC folks that cleaned it up. To my knowledge, there is no talk about when we might get water or electricity. For the lakefront, they are estimating 8 months, but most folks think Chalmette might take longer. It is just heart-breaking. And so the questions arise, what is our role? Does the community need a national park right now? The community loves us, so coming back for our anniversary (Jan. 8th) might be just what is needed (on the other hand, we don't want to get in the way). Hopefully we will be able to better assess what the community wants in the next few weeks.

I'm probably losing four of my seven interpreters to hardship transfers....I certainly can't blame them; most of my staff lost everything. I'm just thankful they are all OK!!! There are so many horror stories... folks

swimming in that water for days and across 14 miles, folks rescued from roofs, folks in the Astrodome, folks who lost pets, and it just goes on and on. I never thought I would refer to a trailer, much less a FEMA trailer in hurricane country as "stability", but after staying in 14 places in 7 weeks, this 32 footer feels awesome! I have a buddy, "Decatur", a Katrina cat that took refuge inside our French Quarter office. My apartment (thank g-- I still rented) was a total loss. I lived east of Orleans, so I got the brunt of the wind - - my roof was blown off and my ceiling caved in....

I'll end this by saying... there are many bright spots. I've seen the perseverance and the heart of the city. I've witnessed the strength and influence of individuals. I've felt the true meaning of family and community, and I've heard the purr of a cat called Decatur."



Aerial photograph of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina on the New Orleans area. Photo Courtesy of Department of Interior

## Slavery Exhibit At New York Historical Society Wows City

"Slavery in New York" is showing from Oct. 7, 2005 to March 5, 2006, at the New- York Historical Society. To quote James Horton, "Slavery was not a side- show in American History. It was the main event." This exhibit is designed to bring home the reality of almost 300 years of slavery to New Yorkers and out- of- towners of all ages. The show draws on the Historical Society's extensive archives. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris edited the catalogue, Slavery in New York which has 11 essays and wonderful illustrations. Do you want to see how to do a blockbuster exhibit that is attracting new visitors to the sponsor?

## President Street Station Attracts UGRR Visitors

A staff member of President Street Station in Baltimore, part of the Maryland Historical Society, reports that UGRR attracts visitors. The connection of the station to freedom seekers escaping via the railroad is responsible for almost all the non- school group tours, that is about 45 to 90 people of all ages, a month. Almost all of them are African-American. In addition to publicity from membership in the Network to Freedom, just a few months ago Baltimore City produced a pamphlet relevant to African-American tourism.

## In Their Footsteps Tour In Rockville

Meet Alfred Homer, Josiah Henson, Ann Maria Weems, and others who escaped from Rockville in the mid- 19th century. The tour of "In Their Steps: A Guided Walking Tour through Rockville sites on the Underground Railroad" tells the story of Rockville's role as an active hub on a Southern route of UGRR. In a county seat located at the juncture of major roads, Rockville's mix of free blacks and slaves, slave owners and abolitionists all have tales to tell. Discover them through local homes and churches, burial grounds, runaway slave ads, and archives. Guides convey the story of paths to freedom such as abduction, manumission, colonization, and the purchase by family members. "In Their Steps" is part of the National Park Service's Network to Freedom. For more information on spring tours, contact Peerless Rockville at 301 -762-0096.

## Catoctin Center For Regional Studies Receives Grant

The Catoctin Center for Regional Studies, a member of the Network to Freedom, recently received an National Endowment for the Humanities America's Historic Places grant, for a broad, 2-year project about the Civil War era (1850 -1870) in the mid- Maryland region. Part of the project looks at African American issues, such as UGRR, John Brown's raid, Taney and the Dred Scott case, and African American soldiers in the war. The Center will create a website and sponsor a conference, lecture series, and bus tours.

# Reginald Lewis Museum Opens In Baltimore

If you haven't been to the new Reginald F. Lewis Museum in Baltimore, you have a treat in store. On June 25, 2005, the museum celebrated its grand opening, inviting the public to "Take the Journey" through the state's history. Maryland may be a small state, but its African American legacy is great. The Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture is dedicated to sharing the courageous journeys toward freedom and self-determination made by

African Americans of Maryland. Museum leaders hope it will be a place to remember struggles, celebrate accomplishments, and serve as a beacon of pride, hope, and inspiration for all people.

The eye-catching building was designed by the award-winning architectural team, the Frelon Group/RTKL, who held fast to the guiding concepts set forth by the museum's leadership of spirituality; joy and vibrancy; resilience; the power of

knowledge; and the importance of family and cultural continuity. Among the exciting features of the building are: a Learning Resource Center (touch-screen computers, printers and Internet access); an Oral History Recording & Listening Room; and a 200-Seat Theater. The Museum is located in downtown Baltimore at 830 E. Pratt Street and is open Tuesday - Sunday 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. For more information, go to: <http://www.africanamericanculture.org/home.html>

---

## Uncle Tom's Cabin Up for Sale In Montgomery County, Maryland



Preservationists would like to conserve a special part of Maryland's heritage. For years privately owned, the Montgomery County house of Isaac Riley, master of Josiah Henson (1789-1883), is up for sale. In Rockville Henson served as his master's plantation manager as well as selling produce in Georgetown and DC. The former plantation is ideally located in Rockville, across from public parking and a

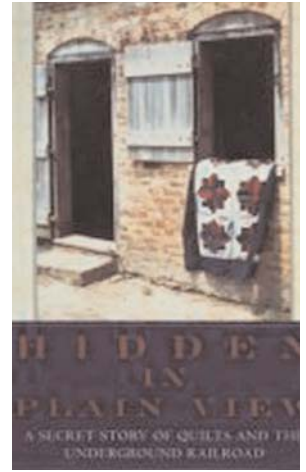
crosswalk. It is a reminder that slavery did exist in Maryland, indeed, where a very different landscape prevails today.

The public claimed that Josiah Henson was the model for the character of Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin. He was, however, much more. He became a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church, escaped to

Canada, and moved to Dawn, Canada, where he became a leader. He published three versions of his autobiography; the first, dictated to Samuel A. Eliot, *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada* [1849], was a best seller. Henson was presented to Queen Victoria and received by President Rutherford B. Hayes.

# Interpretors' Corner:

## Chris Densmore on Hidden in Plain View



The "Underground Railroad Quilt Code" is widely disseminated in popular culture. Hidden in Plain View [by Jacqueline Tobin and Raymond Dobard] continues to sell and shows its influence in numerous ways, from books of quilt patterns, to novels, to curriculum plans for grade schools. On the other hand, most serious and knowledgeable researchers studying the Underground Railroad (UGRR) dismiss the "quilt" code as wishful thinking at best. Yes, there are many strange and wonderful UGRR stories (Henry "Box" Brown having himself shipped from Richmond, Virginia, to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for example); yes, we need to consider carefully oral testimony; yes, African symbols may appear in American textiles. But none of these things supports the particular claims made in Hidden in Plain View.

A major problem is how a member of the general public, who is not a specialist in either historical quilts or the UGRR, can possibly evaluate the claims of Hidden in Plain View. Where is the critical commentary? Basically, "academics" are ignoring the book. Like other "popular" books, it was not reviewed in any "scholarly" or "academic" journals; I looked at the on-line collection of academic journals known as JSTOR which includes most of the major historical journals and journals in the social sciences and humanities, and came up with only one mention of the book. The book was not published by a scholarly press -- a press that has experts examine manuscripts prior to publication.

This is, to me, a problem, not just for this book but for others on the topic of the UGRR. There are good books on the subject and adequate books on the subject, but there are also a wealth of UGRR books that are poorly written, inadequately documented or without any documentation at all, and which repeat doubtful local legends (yes, there is a place for recounting legends -- just be clear where the legend originated and whether there is any support for its validity) or engage in wild speculations. How is the person going to the bookstore, or the library, or wanting a project for school, going to know whether the book marketed and cataloged as non-fiction is, in fact, reliable?

So, the public has no reason NOT to believe in the "quilt code" which is described in a book in the non-fiction section of the library and may have become part of the lessons their children are learning in grade school. They evidently can go to a museum in Atlanta on UGRR quilts. Where is the counter argument? It is in such places like Amazon, in occasionally short pieces on the web (amid all of those elementary school lesson plans) and in Leigh Fellner's excellent web-site [<http://ugr-quilt.hartcottagequilts.com/rrro.htm>]. It comes in comments made by people like me in response to questions. The problem here is that it is too simple to dismiss the counter argument as one person's opinion. Perhaps time has come for a new book -- Hidden in Plain View? Ten Scholars Respond... A bit negative perhaps, but it might

be useful to have a solid, published, response (which could double as an explanation of research skills useful for investigating UGRR claims). Or perhaps a book on latest discoveries about the UGRR, with the emphasis on positive advances, but a chapter or two on the "quilt code."

The divide between so-called "academic" and "popular" books is a disservice to scholarship. Two of the best books on the UGRR in the past few years are Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the Struggle for the Soul of America by Fergus Bordewich and Kate Clifford Larson's biography of Harriet Tubman, Bound for the Promised Land. Bordewich is a writer and independent scholar. Larson has her doctorate in history, but chose to publish with a "popular" rather than an academic press to reach a wider audience. We need to take more seriously the good work being done by researchers outside colleges and universities. We are also obligated to seriously evaluate all of the writing on this very important subject of the Underground Railroad, whether produced by PhDs or independent scholars.

*Curator, Friends Historical Library,  
Swarthmore College*

# NCR UGRR PARK UPDATES & ACTIVITIES

## People

**Goodbye to Cal Calabrese**, the Network to Freedom's patron and guardian angel while Associate Regional Director for Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnerships (Midwest Region). Cal will become the coordinator (Associate Director) of the Upper and Middle Mississippi Valley Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit, a group of universities affiliated to the University of Missouri (Columbia) in order to conduct research on Federal lands. How will the program get along without you?

**Don't Miss...**Chris Densmore, Curator, Quaker Collection, Swarthmore College, and UGRR

expert, who will speak in Leesburg, VA, at the free Quakers, African Americans, Antislavery, and the Underground Railroad in the Mid- Atlantic Region Conference, February 4, 2006, 2 -4 p.m. The conference will be held at:  
Thomas Balch Library  
208 W. Market Street  
Leesburg, VA 20176  
Phone: (703) 737 -7195.

**The Network to Freedom Coordinator** has moved to Room 139, NCR Headquarters, 1100 Ohio Drive, Washington, D.C. 20242, 202-619-7136.

## Welcome The Following New NCR Network to Freedom Members

1. Camp Greene and Contraband Camp, Roosevelt Island, DC, GWMP
2. Berry Farm, Oxon Cove Park, Prince George's County, NACE
3. Shawnee Old Fields Village Site, Allegany Co., MD, C&O Canal NHP
4. Rockland, Washington County, MD (private property)

## Correction.....

The quotation in the article on Harpers Ferry in the last issue mistakenly used a pejorative when Mary Mauzy in her eyewitness account did not use that term: "You said in your letters you expected I almost despised the sight of a Negro. No indeed. Since the insurrection, the poor darkies have been so frightened. None of them believed that old Brown wanted to free them."

# ANNOUNCEMENTS & CALENDAR EVENTS

## 2006 Summer Seminars

The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History announces 21 week-long seminars for teachers or rangers. Go to the website:

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

Seminars are tuition -free; participants receive a \$500 stipend, books, and room and board. Limited to 30 per seminar by competitive application.

Seminars include:

\* North American Slavery in Comparative Perspective, University of Maryland

\* Passages to Freedom: Abolition and the Underground Railroad, Yale University

\* Freedom and Slavery in the Atlantic World, 1500 - 1800, Princeton University

## Websites

**New NPS "National Register Travel Itineraries"**

James River Plantations

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/jamesriver/>

On Hallowed Ground

<http://www.hallowedground.org/>

**"Race and Slavery Petitions Project"**

[http://library.uncg.edu/slavery\\_petitions/about.as](http://library.uncg.edu/slavery_petitions/about.as)

The project is designed to publish surviving legislative and many county petitions on slavery in the South (1770s-1860s). Photocopies of the originals are housed in the Project Archive, Univ. of North Carolina (Greensboro). A searchable database exists giving names, status (slave or free), and color of petitioner[s], subject of petition, and other data, including county of origin, filing date, and disposition. Now available is Series 1: Legislative Petitions (from seven states (DE, Mississippi, NC, SC, TN, TX, and VA). Coming soon will be Series 2: County Court Petitions (fifteen states and DC).

**The Library of Congress Prints & Photographs**

**Division** celebrates one million images from its collections in digital form online.

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/catalog.html>

## Call For Papers & Articles

**The Baltimore City Historical Society** offers the first annual Joseph L. Arnold Prize for Best Writing on Baltimore History. The prize is \$500. Entries are due by Feb. 15, 2006. Entries should be unpublished manuscripts, 15-45 double-spaced pages, sent via electronic mail to: [baltimorehistory@law.umaryland.edu](mailto:baltimorehistory@law.umaryland.edu). Call Marie Schwartz, University of Maryland School of Law, 410-706-3838, with questions.

**November 28 - 2006 National Preservation Conference Call for Educational Session**

**Proposals** invites you to propose an educational session for the 2006 National Preservation Conference, Pittsburgh, PA. The conference theme is Making Preservation Work! The deadline to submit proposals is January 13, 2006. For a proposal form and instructions go to [www.nthpconference.org](http://www.nthpconference.org).

**The National Trust for Historic**

**Preservation** offers scholarships on a competitive basis to cover lodging and transportation to conferences. Those interested should contact the National Trust's regional offices or Jeffrey Harris, Phone: (202) 588-6027, Email: [free\\_harris@nthp.org](mailto:free_harris@nthp.org).

**Craig T. Friend**

[[ctfriend@chass.ncsu.edu](mailto:ctfriend@chass.ncsu.edu)] seeks articles for an anthology on family life in the Old South (1780s-1850s). Express interest by Jan. 1, 2006 to Prof. Friend, Dir. of Public History, Dept. History, 125 Harrelson Hall, Box 8108, N.C. State University, Raleigh, NC 27695-8108, 919-513-2227.

*How do you deal with sensitive issues of slavery and UGRR? Direct your contributions to: [Jenny\\_masur@nps.gov](mailto:Jenny_masur@nps.gov)*



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Capital Region  
1100 Ohio Drive SW  
Washington, DC 20242



NATIONAL  
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD  
NETWORK TO FREEDOM

---

First Class Mail  
Postage and Fees  
**PAID**  
City, State  
Permit Number

---



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom (NTF) was created by Congress in 1998 to honor those who resisted slavery through flight. The Conductor Newsletter was established to inform readers about areas of interest as it relates to the NTF program within the National Capital Region.

Jenny Masur, Editor  
Network to Freedom Coordinator,  
National Capital Region

Monta Coleman, Design & Layout  
Architect  
National Capital Region  
Office of Maintenance & Design

Comments? Please send to:  
Jenny Masur  
Jenny\_Masur@nps.gov

Special thanks to Sean Tull for website assistance.