



Editorial

Free Press Improvements With Thanks to Readers

In responding to our 2007 Underground Railroad Survey conducted in June, *Free Press* readers offered a wealth of useful information and suggestions for improvement to the young *Underground Railroad Free Press*.

Most frequent were reader desires for a universal Underground Railroad event calendar, a central directory of Underground Railroad organizations and a nexus for Underground Railroad information. Collectively, this is a tall order for *Free Press* but we have made what we hope you will think is a good start.

Datebook

Our web site, urrFreePress.com, now features Datebook, a free event calendar where all Underground Railroad and related groups are welcome to have their events posted. Organizations responded generously with listings. See page two here on how to have your event listed.

Lynx

The *Free Press* web site now also features Lynx, a very easy-to-use Underground Railroad directory with direct links to a growing list of organizations. We think we've included all groups but let us know if we haven't. We have had a harder time identifying state, local and Canadian groups and would appreciate your telling us of any not appearing on Lynx.

Nexus

A longer-term effort will be to provide more features to the web site and the publication itself to build them into a comprehensive "go to" spot for most (continued on page two)

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Independent reporting on today's Underground Railroad

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Biden, Obama, Kennedy Sponsor Underground Railroad Law

A bill to strengthen funding and staffing of the National Park Service's Network to Freedom, the federal government's Underground Railroad program, has been introduced in the United States Senate by Senators Joseph Biden (D-Delaware), Barack Obama (D-Illinois), Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) and seven others.

The bill, S.1709, follows a companion House of Representatives bill, H.R. 1239. With three prominent Republican cosponsors, S.1709 has strong bipartisan support.

In our May, 2007, issue, we reported that Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-Florida) and 26 others had sponsored House Resolution 1239 with the same purpose. Since then, H.R. 1239 was passed by the House on a voice vote leaving intact the bill's provision for increasing Network to Freedom staffing from six to

eight which had been mysteriously opposed by the National Park Service. We reported in May that the Park Service would not comment on its opposition. S.1709 includes the staff increase.

Increasing staffing and funding have been strongly supported by *Underground Railroad Free Press*, the National Parks Conservation Association and others.

The senate bill was read twice on June 27 and referred to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Assuming committee approval, it will next be scheduled for debate by the Senate, then the House and sent to the president for signature.

Joseph Biden and Barack Obama are both candidates for the Democratic nomination for president in 2008.

Ohio Memorializes Lett Family Settlements

On July 21, 2007, the Ohio Historical Society, in a ceremony dedicating a roadside plaque, honored the Lett Family Settlements for their contributions to equality and justice in Ohio. For the plaque location, visit thewilds.org.

About 1800, several African-American families related by marriage and as neighbors along the Maryland-Virginia border began settling southeast Ohio's Muskingum County. The settlers included both free blacks and fugitives. Most numerous were the Lett family after whom the area's historic Lett Family Settlements were named.

Historian and Lett descendant Henry Burke

says his ancestors came to Ohio as "pioneers who moved to secure better opportunities."

The families quickly took up the cause of abolitionism in Ohio, became active as freedom seekers, safe-house operators and conductors of the Underground Railroad, and by the mid-1800s mounted strong challenges to the State of Ohio for the right to vote and for public education of their children. The families' men served in the Civil War.

In the 20th century, an energy company began acquiring much of the Lett Family Settlements and strip mined it. The area today is a public 10,000-acre conservation center.

Last Lecture of Famed Berkeley Historian Litwick on Webcast

Earlier this year, Berkeley's Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Leon Litwick, among the foremost chroniclers of African-American history, retired from teaching at age 77.

Litwick won the 1980 Pulitzer Prize and 1981 National Book Award for his *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery*. He also authored *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* and with Congressman John Lewis *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*.

Colleagues and former students flew in from around the country to hear Litwick deliver his specially prepared last teaching lecture to an overflow audience at the end of the Spring semester. Litwick, by all accounts at

his best, delivered a stirring summary of African-American life from Reconstruction to the present, the primary focus of his 50-year career.

Litwick's lecture may be viewed in its entirety at webcast.berkeley.edu/index.php. Click on Events, then History then Golden Apple Award. Move the slider to the one-third point to skip long introductions. A podcast is also available.

For those interested in the true feel of what African-Americans endured during Jim Crow, Litwick's lecture is not to be missed.



Leon Litwick

Underground Railroad matters. This effort would need to include, for example, a research directory which will take some time to put together. We'll let you know of progress on this in future issues and appreciate any suggestions in the meantime.

Thanks again to all of you who have been so much help.

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Friends of the Network to Freedom Association Founded

A support group of the National Park Service has founded Underground Railroad Network, Inc., a private adjunct group of the Park Service's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program. The new group, doing business as Friends of the Network to Freedom Association, had its organizational meeting and elected its founding officers September 15 at a Network to Freedom conference held at Kentucky's Georgetown College.

The Association's purpose is "to generate expertise, education and commemoration connected to the story of the Underground Railroad on a national and international basis".

The organization is a tax-exempt nonprofit corporation with two membership classes.

Voting members include representatives of Underground Railroad sites, programs and facilities listed by the Network to Freedom which omits most Underground Railroad sites because they rely on oral tradition for their history. The Network requires written documentation for admission.

The nonvoting membership class does admit undocumented sites and the general public, a new expansion of Network to Freedom reach recommended by *Free Press* and others.

As of press time, the National Park Service was not able to provide names of the newly elected officers of Friends of the Network to Freedom Association which will be reported in the November issue of *Free Press*.

Thomas Garrett Trial Site Reopens

Restoration complete, Delaware's New Castle Courthouse Museum, 1848 trial site of famed Underground Railroad stationmaster Thomas Garrett, reopens September 28.

Convicted of aiding freedom seekers, Garrett lost all property in meeting his fine. At the end of his trial, Garrett told the judge, "Friend, I haven't a dollar in the world, but if thee knows a fugitive who needs a breakfast,

send him to me." From the 1830s to the end of the Civil War, Garrett and his family aided over 2,700 freedom seekers including Harriet Tubman more than once.

The 1732 Court House was Delaware's first court and state capitol, is one of the nation's oldest surviving court houses and is a National Historic Landmark. For more, visit history.delaware.gov/museums/default.shtml.

Freedom Seeker Frank Wanzer Descendants' Family Reunion

On Christmas Eve, 1855, Frank Wanzer, his fiancée Emily Foster, her sister Mary Elizabeth Grigby and husband Barnaby Grigby, and two unknown others escaped enslavement at Virginia's Oak Hill Plantation, until 1831 owned by President James Monroe, and fled across the Potomac River to freedom.

On Christmas Day, at Hood's Mill, Maryland, the two couples fought off assailants and by New Year's Day, 1856, reached the safehouse of William Still in Philadelphia where they told Still the account of their escape. One of the unknowns was killed in the Christmas encounter, the other captured.

The two couples reached Toronto by January 28, 1856, spending the rest of their lives sharing a home there. In August, 1856, Frank Wanzer rescued his sister, brother in law and friend from Oak Hill, again visited Still and ushered the three to freedom in Canada. Still included the two escape accounts in his landmark 1872 *The Underground Railroad*.

Wanzer, a widower, had had to leave two infant daughters behind in Virginia. Washington DC sculptor Allen Nelson, great-grandson of one of the daughters, was a coordinator of a reunion of Wanzer descendants which took place in Toronto July 27 through 29. Nelson and his sister Winona located the Wanzer and Grigby graves in Toronto's Prospect Cemetery which the reunion gathering visited.

When William Still published *The Underground Railroad*, he commissioned an engraving

of the defense by the Wanzer party at Hood's Mill. This black-and-white engraving, one of the most enduring images of the Underground Railroad, was commissioned by Allen Nelson into the color painting here.



Note: *Free Press* publisher Peter Michael is the great-great-grandson of Margaret and Ezra Michael who sheltered the Wanzer party Christmas Eve, 1855, at their Cooling Springs Farm in Maryland. Friends Peter Michael and Allen Nelson are shown here at Cooling Springs in a photo appearing in an August, 2007, article in *Southern Living* magazine.

