

The Freedom Seeker

Volume I, No. 2

Summer 2004

Coming Events

SAVE THE DATE

October 22 - Escaped Sudanese slave, Francis Bok tells of his experiences (Contact URHPCR for location and time)

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Third Annual URHPCR Conference



By Mary Liz Stewart

The UGR Players for the February Conference (Photo: Clifford Oliver)

The URHPCR's third annual conference was an enormous success. More than three hundred and fifty people came from as far away as Ohio on a bleak Saturday in February to remember the Capital Region's role in the story of the Underground Railroad. The crowd packed St. Joseph's auditorium at the College of Saint Rose for the plenary session..

Risa Faussette, Assistant Professor of History at Saint Rose gave the keynote address on "African American Freedom Seekers and the Quest for Liberty," telling stories of the various ways freedom seekers, African Americans who escaped slavery in the period before the Civil War, made their way to freedom through upstate New York

Other speakers on the program included regional

author Scott Christianson, who spoke about the infamous rescue of Charles Nalle by Harriet Tubman in 1860. Artist Len Tantillo spoke on the role of art in conveying history. In all, more than 50 speakers presented in more than 25 workshops. A feature of the day-long program was "Passage to Freedom...A Spiritual Journey" an original theater piece written and produced by Wanda Webster. It featured the story of fugitives from slavery who passed through the Capital Region.

The program was co-sponsored by the College of Saint Rose. Other sponsors included: Albany City School District; Albany County Convention and Visitors Bureau; Albany County Historical Society; Albany Housing Authority; Albany Alumnae Chapter of Delta

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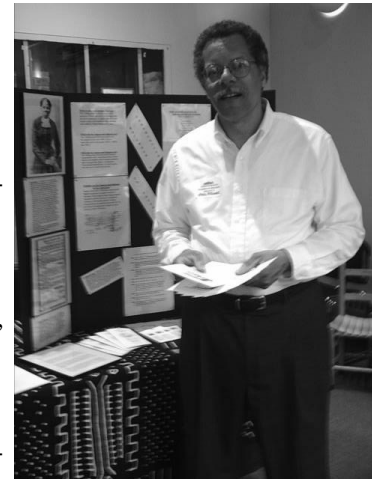
The Freedom Seeker is a publication of the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc., a non-profit corporation dedicated to promoting and encouraging knowledge and understanding of the 19th-century Underground Railroad Movement in the Capital Region, in New York State, and in the United States. This newsletter is published three times a year. Editorial inquiries can be sent to URHPCR, P.O. Box 10851, Albany NY 12201. Email at info@ugrworkshop.com

CONFERENCE

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Sigma Theta Sorority; Albany Public School Teachers Association; Kenneth Baker; Capital Region Baptist Carrier; J. W. Bouchard; City of Albany; FOCUS Churches of Albany; Freedom, Justice and Hope, Inc.; Greater Capital Region Teacher Center; Hartgen Archeological Associates; Historic Albany Foundation, Inc.; NAACP-Albany Branch; New York African American Research Foundation; One Hundred Black Men of Albany Capital District; Pioneer Savings Bank; Rensselaer County Historical Society; Schenectady County Historical Society; Touhey Associates; and the Upstate History Alliance. The project thanks them for their support, without which our annual conferences would be impossible.

If you are interested in participating in future conferences, please contact Mary Liz or Paul Stewart, c/o URHPCR.



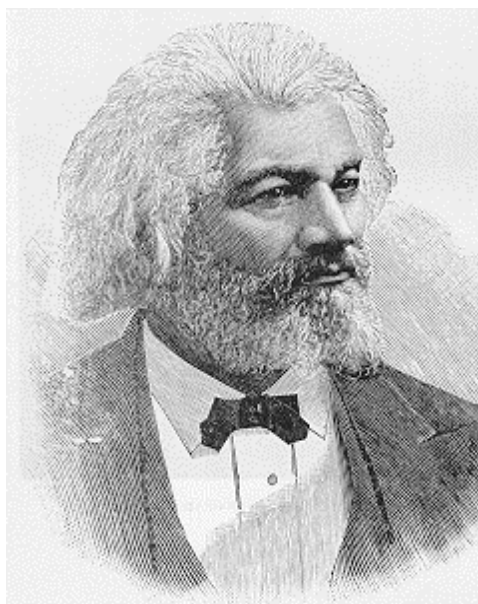
Paul Stewart, President of URHPCR, hands out programs at the conference. (Photo by Mary Liz Stewart)

Stephen Myers: Underground Railroad Conductor

By Paul Stewart

Stephen Myers (YEARS) was one of the most significant figures in Albany's Underground Railroad, actively assisting freedom seekers for nearly 30 years.

Frederick Douglass recalled Myers as an important conductor on the Underground Railroad: "...fugitives were received in Philadelphia by William Still, by him sent to New York, where they were cared for by Mr. David Ruggles, and afterward by Mr. Gibbs, ... thence to Stephen Myers at Albany ...". Myers helped build the community of



Frederick Douglass considered Myers one of the underground railroads most important activists

free blacks in Albany in part from the ranks of freedom seekers; he also advocated greater occupational opportunity for blacks, better education and the general betterment of the local population.

But Myers did not act alone. Early in his career as an anti-slavery activist, he was associated with a group called the Northern Star Association which published *The Northern Star and Freeman's Advocate*, a newspaper that focused on self-help for the African-American community as well as abolition and temperance.

According to Myers' own testimony in the *Northern Star and Freeman's Advocate*, he was involved in assisting freedom seekers on their journey north as early

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News and Notes

Guided Walking Tours of Albany downtown Underground Railroad sites will be conducted on the following dates this summer and fall:

- ◆ Sunday, June 13
- ◆ Sunday, July 11
- ◆ Sunday, August 8
- ◆ Sunday, September 12
- ◆ Sunday, October 10



Other scheduled speaking events

- ◆ May 17 — Giffin School, Albany
- ◆ May 28 — Waling Tour with Girlfriends Club, Albany
- ◆ July 13 — College of St. Rose Youth Summer Camp, Albany

◆ August 10 — Carnival on the Hill, West Hill Neighborhood, Albany



New Members: Joe M. Cavazos, Jack Mayer & Mary Ann Lettau,

Mabel Leon, Enid Mastriani & Stephen Williams, Hugh Jenkins, Delores M. Walters, PhD, A. Louise Yeaton, Robert K. Wallace, Lucy Wong, Matthew Kirk, Mary Louise Baum, Carol L. Murphy



The Northern Star and Freeman's Advocate—Albany Abolition newspaper in the early 1840s

BECOME A MEMBER

The Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. (URHPCR) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and encouraging knowledge and understanding of the 19th-century Underground Railroad Movement in the Capital Region, in New York State, and in the United States. Among other goals, URHPCR promotes and encourages historical research and education on the Underground Railroad Movement and seeks to mark places of historic interest relating to the Underground Railroad Movement in the Capital Region.

Benefits of Charter Membership:

- ◆ Invitation to the annual Albany Conference in February 2004.
- ◆ Subscription to *The Freedom Seeker* (published three times a year).
- ◆ Invitations to URHPCR special events
- ◆ Walking tour of Downtown Albany Underground Railroad Sites for a nominal charge.
- ◆ Calendar of local, state, and national events on the Underground Railroad Movement

A limited number of subsidized individual memberships is available. Please call 518.432.4432 for more information.

Check one:

- Individual \$ 25.00
- Family 37.50
- Contributing 50.00
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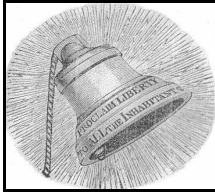
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Stephen Myers

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as 1831. During the 1840s, Myers spoke around the region on behalf of the Northern Star Association, collecting money on behalf of fugitives.

This work continued when the local Vigilance Committee was formed later that decade. One of the most important Underground Railroad groups in the City of Albany, the Vigilance Committee was active into the 1850s. Like its many counterparts throughout the northern states, the committee assisted thousands of fugitive slaves in their escape through Albany on their way to freedom in the northern United States and Canada.

Among the goals of such committees was protecting fugitive slaves from re-enslavement under the notorious Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and assisting them in their flight to northern states or Canada. Some version of the Albany committee continued to exist up to the Civil War, often using Myers' home as its base of operations. According to historian C. Peter Ripley "[Myers'] Albany station had the reputation of being the best-run part of the Underground Railroad in the state. He sheltered



Stephen Myers

many fugitives in his own home and personally raised funds to sustain the Albany Vigilance Committee.

Myers' was tireless in assisting freedom seekers. In 1856 the Vigilance Committee recognized Myers' for helping 287 fugitives over a period of merely ten-months.