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The Freedom Seeker

Summer 2009

The Seminole UGR

By: Andor Skotnes

Perhaps the most successful episode of mass escape from slavery in North America occurred, not along the well-known routes from South to North, but on a route from South to further south, into Florida. Those who escaped along this route, along with their allies, built the largest and most resilient independent community of former slaves in what became the US. And they mounted the most protracted and effective armed resistance ever against the British/US Slavocracy. This story of escape and resistance is the story of the Seminole people.

The Seminoles first emerged as a distinct people in Spanish Florida during the mid 1700s, formed by groups from several Native American tribes and by fugitive slaves of African descent who were all refugees from European colonialism. From their very beginnings, the Seminoles were a bi-racial/ethnic people who intermarried across lines of descent and blended African and Indian cultures. The name Seminole was probably derived from the Spanish word *cimarron* (in English, *maroon*) which denotes a community of escaped slaves.

Over much of a century, the Seminoles received fugitive slaves — maybe several thousand — while driving back the cross-border raids of slave catchers and military units from the north. Florida's Spanish colonial

government welcomed the Seminoles as a buffer against, and a resource drain on, the rival Anglo-American colonialism. Then in the late 1810s, the US military waged full-scale



Abraham, a Black Seminole leader
from N. Orr's engraving published in 1848 in *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* by John T. Sprague, 1848
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Abraham-black-sem.jpg>

war on the Seminoles, and the Seminoles again prevailed.

However, in the 1830s, a decade after Spain seceded Florida to the US, the federal government began removing Indian peoples from the southeast. The Seminoles resisted, and the Second Seminole War erupted in 1835. By 1842, the Seminoles were exhausted and agreed to transportation to Indian Territory. But when the US government insisted that the Black Seminoles first be "returned" to slavery in the South, the Seminoles as a whole refused, and the US, faced with the possibility of renewed war, backed down.

The majority of the Seminoles, of both indigenous and African descent, were moved west, although some

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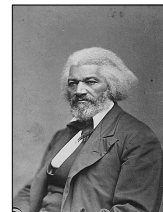
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The Freedom Seeker is a publication of Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc., a non-profit corporation dedicated to promoting knowledge of the 19th century Underground Railroad Movement and its legacy in the Capital Region, 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, New York 12201. Email at info@ugrworkshop.com.

A 4th of July Oration - Liberty and Justice for All ?

In 1852 Frederick Douglass challenged the rhetoric of America with the conditions of Africans in America at his time. Today we revisit Douglass's challenges in light of our modern setting in a new political era.



Saturday, July 4th * 11 am — 1 pm
The Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence
194 Livingston Ave., Albany
Free & open to all
Bring your own chair - Limited facilities available



Guest speaker:

Dr. A.J. Williams-Myers
Professor, Black Studies, SUNY New Paltz, historian, educator & author

Partial funding provided by:

New York Council for the Humanities

Meet the new Board Members



Colwyn Allen - is a graduate of Brooklyn College of the City University of New York and holds a Masters degree from the University of North Carolina of Chapel Hill. He has a background in health services delivery to low income communities. He retired from the NYS Office for the Aging in 2007. Colwyn is a member of the Jazz Event and July 4th Event Committees.



Pat Barrot - is site manager of the Mabee Farm Historic Site in Rotterdam. She has a long experience in marketing and cultural history. Pat is currently a member of the Conference Planning Committee.



Robert Bullock - is President of NYS Archives Partnership Trust and has extensive background in public affairs and communication. He is a Lieutenant Colonel in the New York Air National Guard. Bob is currently a member of the Membership and Fundraising Committees.



Alethia Jones - is Asst. Professor in the Department of Public Administration and Policy / Political Science at SUNYA. She holds a Ph.D. from Yale University. She has numerous publications to her credit, including "Immigration and Institutional Change: the Origins of the US Postal Savings Banks" (2009). Alethia is the Board Secretary.



Mae Saunders - is a retired professional chef with extensive community service involvement, including participation in Community United for Quality Education and the Community Accountability Board. Mae is a member of the Jazz Event Committee, the July 4th Event Committee, and the UGR History Conference Fundraising Subcommittee.

Thank you to retiring board members Al Wells, Charlie Touhey, Ahimsa Teabout, Benita Law Diao, and Walter Wheeler for their unwavering commitment to the work of URHPCR over the last six years.

The Myers Residence - An Update

The past month has been a time we have long awaited! Beginning on May 6th construction crews began addressing some of the repair needs that were identified through the various studies that have been done by Stephen Tilly Architects and Robert Silman Associates engineering firm. Each day another step and a little more work has been completed. The old rear porch which has been deemed non-historic has been removed. Brick problems, where courses of brick were missing on the front of the building and along the east side, have been re-bricked and repaired.

Inside the building where engineers were uncertain of the strength of certain areas the building has been shored up with scaffolding and timbers from the basement through the third floor. Within the attic special procedures are being taken to help the wall areas at the point of the roof do a better job of holding the roof frames in place.

Our sign for participation in the Environmental Protection Program funding has been put up on the front of

the building. The wooden steps in the front of the Residence have been replaced with a more durable construction of wooden stairs.

As construction moves forward one can expect to find the various recommendations made within the recently completed



Myers Residence back view - floors 2 and 3 with scaffolding, beam supports, and covered vented window spaces.

Historic Structure Report put into effect. The report, completed just this past February, presented a range of repair recommendations and offered directions as to how the reconstruction and restoration work should proceed. Now for the Master Plan, archeological study, and Phase 1 and 2 restoration plans!

News and Notes

Donations to Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. are gladly accepted by donating online on the homepage of www.ugrworkshop.com or by using the enclosed envelope.

People of Courage, People of Hope, Seekers of Justice 2009 UGR walking tours in downtown Albany will be held on July 12, August 16, September 20, and October 11. Details available at www.ugrworkshop.com or 518-432-4432.

Stephen and Harriet Myers Residence and UGR Campus clean-up dates - bring your gloves, gardening tools, enthusiasm, and muscle power to 194 Livingston Avenue on Aug. 8, Sept. 12, and Oct. 3, 2009. Clean ups begin at 9am and conclude by 1pm.

Welcome to new and renewing members, Rosetta Crawlay, Dorsey and Elaine Whitehead, Robin Krawitz, Sheila Rorke, Maryellen Urtz, Sharon F. Calhoun, Mary E. Mounteer, Janet Walker, Melissa Landau-Strauss, J. Peter Hardman, Murphy Orchards, Joan E. Traver, Julia R. Holcomb, Ahimsa Teabout, Robert L. Hall, Christine Connell, Jeannie & Jeffrey Straussman.

Thank you to the Honorary Committee of the annual URHPCR Jazz Event. We could not have done it without your support. Please see a complete listing on the URHPCR website.

Volunteers needed for work of URHPCR Committees. Can you contribute time to the Jazz Event Committee, the Conference Committee, the Finance Committee, or the Property Committee? Do you like to organize files or books? Do you like to maintain databases? Would you like to assist with fundraising? Join us in achieving the mission of URHPCR by volunteering your time and talents.

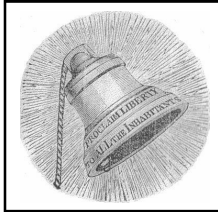
Mark your calendars for these upcoming events -

- ◆ **URHPCR Board Meetings** - the 2nd Wednesday of every month, except August and December, at 6pm at Interfaith Homeless Partnership, 176 Sheridan Avenue, Albany
- ◆ **Property Committee meetings** - the 2nd Monday of every month, at 5:30pm. Check www.ugrworkshop.com or call 518-432-4432 for location information
- ◆ **Conference Planning Meetings** - the 1st Monday of each month at 7pm. Check www.ugrworkshop.com or call 518-432-4432 for location information
- ◆ **Aug. 1-2 - Civil War Encampment** - John Brown Farm State Historic Site - www.nysparks.state.ny.us/events
- ◆ **Sept. 4-7 - 85th Homecoming Celebration** at Buxton National Historic Site and Museum - www.buxtonmuseum.com
- ◆ **Sept. 16-19 - UGR Conference** - Friends of the Network to Freedom Association, Inc. - www.ugrfriends.org
- ◆ **Oct. 23-25 - Induction and Abolition Conference** - National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum - www.abolitionhof.org

**UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
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ON THE WEB AT
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The Seminole UGR

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stayed, and Black and Indian Seminole communities exist to this day in the Midwest and in Florida. These communities, despite the daunting problems they face, are the legacy of an amazing and heroic chapter in the history of the resistance to slavery and, indeed, of the southern Underground Railroad.

Sources on Black Seminoles

Web Sites

Rebellion: John Horse and the Black Seminoles
<http://www.johnhorse.com/>

The Black Seminoles' Long March to Freedom
<http://www.cny.cuny.edu/library/News/seminoles2.html>

Black Seminoles
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Seminoles

Black Seminoles, Maroons and Freedom Seekers in
Florida
[http://www.africanaheritage.com/
black_seminoles_1.asp](http://www.africanaheritage.com/black_seminoles_1.asp)

Florida researchers launch first excavation of black
Seminole town

<http://news.ufl.edu/2001/06/14/black-seminole/>

The Black Seminole Indians Keep Fighting for Equality in
the American West

[http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/18/opinion/editorial-
observer-black-seminole=indians-keep-fighting-for-equality-
american.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/18/opinion/editorial-observer-black-seminole=indians-keep-fighting-for-equality-american.html)

Books

Kenneth W. Porter, *The Black Seminoles: History of a
Freedom-Seeking People*

Bruce Edward Twyma, *The Black Seminole Legacy and
North American Politics*

William Loren Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage*

Dr. Ray Von Robertson, *A Unique Examination of the Black
Diaspora: The Plight of the Black Seminoles*

Video

Black Indians: An American Story

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