

New Keese Homestead Historic Marker Dedicated



From left to right, Neal Burdick, Lita Kelly, and Keese Homestead owners Ann and Lincoln Sunderland. Photo by Helen Nerska Allen. Keese Homestead photo courtesy Peter H. Rowley and Sandi L. Craig.

A new historic marker was dedicated at abolitionist Peter Keese's Ausable, New York, homestead on August 20, 2009. Keese signed a petition calling for an end to slavery in Washington D.C and another in support of the Clinton Country Anti-Slavery Society's 1837 organizing convention. The \$1,100 marker was purchased from contributions collected at a 2008 Neal Burdick lecture-Lita Kelly concert and donations from dairyman Jon Rulfs, Peter Keese's great-great granddaughter Ann Keese Chien and her son, David Chien. At the dedication of the sign, Neal Burdick made the following remarks:

In the names of all of my Keese ancestors, thanks for being here today. Five or six generations of my family lived on this land (I'm not sure of the exact number; I don't have a family tree, I have a family jungle that's hard to untangle, but I know Keeses had a presence here for over 185 years), and I'd like to think they're looking down on us today, and approving what we do here.

I invite you to close your eyes for a moment... and when you open them, imagine it's 1789, and all about you is thick forest, except for a narrow trail and a small hut cobbled together by the first Keeses, Quakers from the Hudson Valley. They've claimed lands near here as payment for their services in surveying it after the American Revolution.

Listen carefully -- perhaps you can hear the sounds of September 11, 1814, when the concussions from cannon in the Battle of Plattsburgh carried this far from the lake. The Keeses, opposed to war on religious grounds, did not take part, but prayed for an American victory, and their prayers were answered.

Now we jump ahead to 1837. Peter Keese has done well by himself, and is constructing this grand Potsdam sandstone home for himself and his family. Up the road toward Peru, the Quaker Union is a bustling community of over 400 families, many of them Keeses or related to Keeses, farming, teaching, lumbering, conducting businesses and raising families.

Next, it's 1855, and a couple of miles north Stephen Keese Smith, first cousin once removed of Peter Keese and one of many Keese abolitionists, is hiding runaway slaves in his barn, before ferrying them north closer to the Canadian border and freedom. He exemplifies the Keese traits of firm convictions and practicing what they preach.

Let us move now to the 1890s. The Quaker Union is in decline, the victim of internal dissent and the economic and social forces that have assaulted rural communities throughout history. But this homestead remains.

It's the early years of the 20th century. The Union is no more, the road no longer the main highway between Peru and Keeseville. The last burial in the Quaker cemetery at the next corner has taken place. But the homestead remains.

And so a leap of a century brings us to today. Little is left of the Quaker community and its Keese leaders — a silent burial ground, full of wildflowers; the sagging barn where SKS sequestered his frightened charges; a meeting house, identifiable by its two front doors; and this homestead, sturdy as the day it was built, reminding us of who and what once were here. To the Sunderlands, thanks for being such good stewards of a place that's very important to me even though I no longer live nearby; to those of you who helped make restoration of this sign possible, my gratitude for keeping alive a story that's important to all of us. With your diligence, it will never die.

Making History Happen

Steering Committee- Board Meetings

Members and friends are invited to attend our Steering Committee and Board of Trustee meetings which take place the third Tuesday of every month (except July and December) from 5:30 to 7:30 pm in the library of Plattsburgh's First Presbyterian Church at 34 Brinkerhoff Street. Help us plan and prepare for the grand opening of the Town of Chesterfield Visitors Center and North Star Underground Railroad Museum. Volunteer for our Transition, Membership, Program, Fund Raising or Collections Committee. For more information, call Don at 561-0277.



Installation of new Board Members, from left to right: Julius Archibald Jr., Richard Ward, Margaret Schwartz, Steven Engelhart (standing in for Frank Kinnelly), Lita Kelly. Vice President Margaret Gibbs and 2009 Lantern Light Award winner, Jackie Madison, in foreground. Photo by Luke T. Bush.

2009 Annual Meeting

We sang "Freemen Awake!" as we opened our fourth annual meeting on June 20th at the Ausable Valley Grange Hall in Keeseville. Treasurer Ramatoulaye Djermakoye reported net income for 2008 of \$2,953 and ending net assets of \$10,863. President Don Papson summarized our progress over the past year. Major highlights were events organized by Vivian Papson: Black History month's The Spirit Says "Sing!" with UGRR singers Kim and Reggie Harris and Lee Clark's Museum Day portrayal of Adirondack guide Billy Nye who helped bury John Brown in December of 1859. Jackie Madison completed our web site design, and Beth Barnes got us online. Design Divisions, Inc.'s Mike Hanke was chosen to create our UGRR exhibits for the Town of Chesterfield Visitors Interpretive Center. We now have a solid foundation for the 2010 opening of the Visitors Center and North Star UGRR Museum.

The Saratoga Springs Visitors Center organized a successful Solomon Northup Day celebration. We will honor Northup in future years at our Visitors Center as well. Amendments Committee Chairperson, Jackie Madison, presented proposed amendments for our Constitution and Bylaws. It was unanimously agreed that a vote would be taken on September 20th at a special membership meeting at Ausable Chasm. The day would include a potluck picnic and tours of the Estes House.

A Class of 2011 was formed with a one year extension of Ramatoulaye Djermakoye's term and the election of Jim Bailey, S. Booker, Frank Perusse and Mitchell Ray to two year terms. The class of 2012 was created with the election of Frank Kinnelly, Lita Kelly, Julius A. Archibald Jr, Margaret Schwartz, and Dick W. Ward. (Remaining Board members Margaret Gibbs, Don Papson, Vivian Papson, Kathy Lavoie and Jackie Madison constitute the class of 2010.) A Certificate of Appreciation was presented to outgoing Board member Marilyn Van Dyke of Warren County. Outgoing Board Members Carol Thompson, Nancy Fink, Renee Moore and Debi Craig were also acknowledged, and it was announced that their Certificates would be mailed to them. The newly elected members of Board of Trustees were installed.

Jacqueline E. Madison was presented a Lantern Light Award for crystalizing our vision statement, designing our web site and chairing the amendments committee.

The announced raffle was canceled as illness prevented coordinator, Kathy Lavoie, from being with us. Lita Kelly led us in singing, "The Tree of Life," and "Song of the Abolitionist." Refreshments and fellowship followed.

Special Membership Meeting

Amendments to our Bylaws and Constitution were adopted at a special membership meeting on September 20, 2009. Thirty members and friends met at the Ausable Chasm Pavilion for the vote and shared a potluck picnic. Then everyone visited the Estes House to see it before renovations began. All enjoyed the great weather, food, and fellowship.



NCUGRHA members and friends visit Estes House. Photo by Lita Kelly.