

North Star Underground Railroad Museum

Report for the 2011 Annual Meeting of NCUGRHA

All the previous reports reflect the absolute success of the Association and the North Star Underground Railroad Museum. I am so proud of the Museum's message and of how special our volunteers are. The museum constantly reawakens an interest in previously little known history and brings a personal message of determination and strength to many. Some of our treasured visitors this year found their ancestors' stories and many were deeply moved by the Museum's stories - a continuing tribute to our curator Don Papson.

Children were also treasured visitors. Through our museum they learn more about the heritage of the area they are growing up in and to quote a 2nd grader 'this was the best field trip ever'! The Museum and Association are also offering opportunities for students through internships. Joan Eastabrook got our visitors' manual and scrapbooks started and worked diligently on the barn restoration project. We have one intern currently working on an exhibit and another scheduled to start on an additional exhibit in the fall – and we had a wonderful intern who put on our summer's children's program. Young people are critical to our success as an educational institution.

The museum now provides for sale the most complete selection of books on underground railroad stories north of Albany. Vivian Papson provided the guidance we needed to choose the right books and Mitchell Ray is reviewing additions regularly. Each book has been vetted by our association. And teachers buy them by the bagfull. We also have a few items for the 'shoppers' but all such items are either fair trade or made in the US. We stretched it a bit for the mugs which are made 'somewhere' but were printed locally.

The museum could not have been successful without its volunteers. Our painting crew worked miracles, our gardens were created by an expert, Don Papson and Frank Kinnelly were an amazing team handling all those pesky details – and the docents were the crowning (no pun intended) glory of the Museum's year. The museum was scheduled to be open Tuesday to Sunday – already a heavy schedule – but Charlie Crowningshield and Mitchell Ray insisted we be open seven days a week and committed to docenting the extra day – in addition to their other slots. So we changed all our materials to read 9 to 4 – seven days a week –do the math – 49 hours a week and the result was over 4000 visitors. Three of our docents became board members and now one more has agreed to join our board – with the stipulation that she wanted to contribute (she docented regularly last year already).

We open for our 2nd year on Memorial Day – we need more docents – of course – with docent training beginning May 16th (6-7:30 pm) at the museum. This year Suzanne Hand has joined the admin staff of the association and will help with the museum management. We are happy to welcome her to her first ‘official’ meeting today.

2011 was an amazing and rewarding year. I do miss Frank every day but know he would be so glad we are moving ahead so well. Peter Slocum’s stimulating program based out of the museum will attract much attention this year. And Don’s continuing passion for the Association and the Museum continues to guide us forward. So . . . bring on the thousands of visitors! We know they won’t be disappointed!

Helen Nerska

May 6, 2012