

## President's Report for the 2013/2014 Annual Meeting

### **Recognize the Board, Manager, and any visiting dignitaries.**

2013/2014 was a challenging year for the organization and me. While we continue to promote freedom, we were charged with replacing the manager for the museum, starting to plan for new exhibits and the possibility of a new Underground Railroad site.

#### Summary of the Year's Activities:

Bill Umbreit continues to work on the Stephen Keese Smith barn. Bill will need some labor to shore up the lean to on the barn, so we can continue to have access to the Underground hiding area.

Helen Nerske, the manager for the North Star Underground Railroad Museum, resigned in October 2013. She continues to volunteer and served on the Board until this month. Helen was the first manager of the museum, initiated the Freedom Festival of Music and the Street Drive for the Association. Although she will no longer be on the Board, she is continuing to serve as a docent and volunteer.

Marlene Almodovar became the manager of the Museum in June 2014. She has been proactive with computer security and with publicizing the museum to the community. Marlene is from Puerto Rico and moved to the North Country from New York City. She is pursuing a Master's degree from Capella University and has eagerly taken on her role as a Manager. Marlene has a son, daughter and granddaughter.

Dr. Palmer was having some work done in the basement of his home which was formerly owned by Dr. Rowson. During the renovations, his contractor discovered possible historical evidence that lead to the fireplace on the main floor. Addie Shields, the previous historian for Beekmantown, said that this home was associated with the Underground Railroad. To our knowledge, there isn't any documented paperwork. The Association is working with Dan Ferguson, metal detector specialist, and Dr. Palmer to find evidence of any connection to the Underground Railroad. They have found a sign with Dr. Rowson's name, nails, jewelry, and a horseshoe from that time period.

In October, the Museum held a writer's workshop which was taught by Susannah Risley, an author. The workshop focused on teaching attendees to write their family history.

In partnership with the Cumberland Movie Theater, the Association had a special showing of 12 Years a Slave with the Founder of the Museum, Don Papson, and the Founder of Solomon Northrup's Day, Renee Moore, as presenters to a question and answer session on the movie and Northrup. As the founder of Solomon Northrup's Day in

Saratoga Spring this year she was recognized for that role by Skidmore College, her alma mater.

The museum has been featured in several articles and a couple of books. And, we've had several tour groups of 20 or more visitors. Last year we had 6,000 visitors and we may match that number this year. Also, the bus tours of the Underground Railroad sites in Keeseville and Peru have grown in popularity. We added two weekends, one in August and another one this month.

There is an Exhibits Committee which is chaired by Don Papson. This committee will be planning and designing new exhibits for the museum. Don is seeking volunteers to be on this committee.

The Development Committee is now the Funding Committee. We're seeking volunteers who may be interested in fund development.

Board meetings moved from at 4:00 pm on Fridays to Mondays at 9:00 am. Our next meeting will be held November 17<sup>th</sup> at 9:00 am.

The Association participated in the Street Drive again this year and raised over \$1350.00.

The Museum has a new open flag on Route 9.

The Association held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Freedom Festival of Music on August 7<sup>th</sup>.

NCUGRHA received a grant of \$500.00 from Stewarts. This grant is designated for the traveling exhibit.

**Upcoming: November** – Tom Calarco and Don Papson's book entitled, Secret Lives of the Underground Railroad book talk and signing. This event will be held later this year. Members will be notified.

As you can see, it has been a year of ups and downs. While we continue to pursue our mission which is to research, preserve, interpret, and the promote the Underground Railroad history of Northeastern New York's Waterways to Freedom and to celebrate the importance of that history and its relevance and significance to our own time, I would ask each of you to consider your role in promoting freedom today. However, you pursue this mission I would ask that you remember, this mission requires us to act as a team to accomplish it. To accomplish it, we need to put aside our differences and move forward in a positive manner. We must remember that there are more slaves today, than all the slaves in America before the Civil War. History should be a lesson and not a continuation of bad behavior.

## **Bill Umbreit – Lantern Award Winner**

Our lantern winner for 2014 is Bill Umbreit. Bill is a barn rehabilitator and restoration mason. He is a member of the New York State Barn Coalition, an organization of contractors that encourages those who work on historic buildings to pursue preservation-oriented maintenance strategies and repair techniques. The Barn Coalition recommends following a few important preservation principles known as the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. Often referred to as the "Standards" for short, they were developed by the National Park Service (NPS) as an underlying philosophy to guide preservation planning. The Standards recommend maintaining distinctive features, repairing rather than replacing and, when deteriorated beyond repair, replacing historic building fabric with in-kind materials. Bill became active with the association in 2009 and has overseen the barn restoration at Frank and Jacquelyn Perusse's home which is the former home of Stephen Keese Smith. He was instrumental in restoring the hidden area in the barn which many of you may have seen on your tour of Underground Railroad Sites in Keeseville and the Peru area and made the barn safe for the archaeological dig that took place between 2010 and 2012. Bill was truly a gem of a find for the Association, as his expertise allowed us to bring the past to individuals today. This lantern is a small token of all that you have done for the Association and is a small thank you for your generosity.

## **Photo Hanging**

A ten year process culminated for the Town of Chesterfield on May 14, 2011 when Supervisor Gerald Morrow and NCUGRHA President Don Papson cut the ribbon for the Town's Heritage Center and North Star Underground Railroad Museum. Prior to the ribbon cutting, Frank Kinnelly organized volunteers to paint the buildings interior. Today, we are bringing each of these men together in an official photo hanging to commemorate their roles in getting the Town's Heritage Center and the North Star Underground Railroad Museum officially up and running.

**Frank Kinnelly** – was the first Vice President and Finance Chair of the North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association. He organized a terrific team of volunteers to paint the interior of the Town of Chesterfield Heritage Center and North Star U.G.R.R. Museum. Frank was keenly aware of finances and participated in fundraising activities such as the Spaghetti Dinner and seeking corporate sponsors. While he utilized his intellect to move the Association forward, he was also a person to get his hands dirty. Frank had no problem in doing things that would promote the Association and could be seen at times assisting his wife with the flowers and other plants. As you know he is no longer physically with us, but will always be present in our memories.

**Gerry Morrow** – is the Town Supervisor for the Town of Chesterfield. He was instrumental in obtaining the grant funding for the building. Gerry worked tirelessly to make sure that the Heritage Center and the Museum would open in 2011. In addition, he supported our fundraising Spaghetti dinners, provided financial assistance, assisted with our bus tours and was instrumental in making sure that the building was prepared. He has always been available to Don, myself and others working for the Association. His dedication to this has been a vital resource for the Association and we hope to continue to work with Gerry and the Town of Chesterfield for a long time. The Association thanks you for everything you've done for us.

**Don Papson** – is a teacher, historian and to many. Without his foresight, we would not be here. Don was the researcher and found most of the information that we have in the exhibits. He has dedicated nearly 20 years to the work of the Association which was formally founded in 2005. While many of us may not have seen the vision, Don was always focused on a museum to display the stories of the Abolitionists and Freedom Seekers that he uncovered. He not only placed the Lake Champlain area on the National Underground Railroad map, he has brought pride to those individuals residing in this community. Don is like a pitbull. When he gets a hold of something that's important, he doesn't let it go until he feels it's the right time.

These gentlemen, Don, Frank, and Gerry, have made a huge contribution to the communities in this area and brought recognition to Freedom Seekers and Abolitionists who came through or lived in this region of New York. Because of people today and generations in the future will hear their stories.

The Association wishes to hang their photo in the museum as a thank you for their dedicated work in researching, funding and founding the Town of Chesterfield Heritage Center and the North Star Underground Railroad Museum.