

## Harriet Tubman Talk Draws Overflow Crowd

An illustrated lecture on the legendary Harriet Tubman, the famous face of America's Underground Railroad, drew an overflow crowd on Sunday, Oct. 16, at the Peru Free Library.

Sponsored by the North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association (NCURGHA) and supported by the NYS Council for the Humanities, the presentation by Dr. Milton Sernett, a leading scholar of Upstate New York anti-slavery efforts, focused on the many popular versions and public uses of Tubman's story. Using a colorful slide show, Sernett, demonstrated that Tubman's real story has been shrouded in myth and romantic memory for more than 100 years.

But the Syracuse University emeritus professor, who has spent decades researching the diminutive, illiterate freedom seeker, argued that she emerges from the mythological realm -- she was once called an American Joan of Arc -- as a true heroine in real life, as well. If she actually led 70 people to freedom, instead of thousands or 300 as sometimes reported, she was a courageous leader nonetheless.

Sernett entertained the audience of about 60 people with photos of book covers, comic books and movie ads that fostered the legend of Tubman, leading escaping slaves from Maryland to Canada during the 1840s and 1850s. He explained that his new book, "Harriet Tubman: Myth, Memory and History," resulted from years spent digging into "nooks and crannies of historical research."

"One of the myths about the Underground Railroad is that the evidence isn't there," he said. Sernett, who visited the new North Star Underground Railroad Museum earlier in the day, noted, "As the North Star Museum tells us, the evidence is there, but it has to be teased out."

The North Star Museum details stories of the Champlain Line of the Underground Railroad, including the families and churches who helped people escape to Canada. It is open daily from Memorial Day to Columbus Day, and by appointment for tours and groups at other times. 518-834-5180. ([www.freedomcenter.org/underground-railroad/history/people/Harriet-Tubman/](http://www.freedomcenter.org/underground-railroad/history/people/Harriet-Tubman/)) ([www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harriet\\_Tubman](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harriet_Tubman))

