

# President's Report for the 2023 Annual Meeting

## **Welcome Everyone & Recognize the `Board and Volunteers**

Before we start, I would like a moment of silence for our former Parliamentarian, Dr. Julius Archibald, who passed away suddenly in September. Let's have a moment of silence for him.

I would like welcome our members to the 18<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association and thank the board members, docents and volunteers for the support they've provided to the Association. Ask Board Members to raise their hands and then ask Docents. Our museum would not function without these individuals. We're an organization that is composed of only volunteers, no staff, and we are always seeking volunteers. If you're interested in becoming one, please let me or any of the board members here know. The board members here today are: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Our opening song is Wade in the Water and our program will start with the Finance report.

Opening Song: Swing Low Sweet Chariot  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljup8cIRzIk>)

**Wade in the Water** ( [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7\\_euSS86dvE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7_euSS86dvE) )

Finance Report included in your program. Explain the report

We had more funds go out than come into the organization. Our membership drive took place in May and in June we made \$195 on our Juneteenth program. Our organization had to make repairs to our furnace, bathroom, and in January a limb fell on the electrical line which tore off the meter box. These repairs contributed to more funds going out than coming into the organization.

We will now have our committee reports.

## **Committee Reports:**

Bequest with Jim Kloiber

Planning/Communications with John Mitchell

At this time, I will provide a summary of the year's activities.

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

## President's Report for the 2023 Annual Meeting

The Board meets the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of each month except December due to the holidays. Our next meeting will be November 14 at 6:00 pm. We meet on the second floor of the Plattsburgh Library.

The North Star Underground Railroad Museum opened this year on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from Memorial weekend through Indigenous/Columbia Day. We had 2,147 visitors and 488 under 18 this open season.

Special tours this season included cadets from West Point with a tour of the hiding place in the barn on Stephen Keese Smith former farm, virtual tour with a professor at Paul Smith's College, librarians from the New York State Regional Library Networks, Dr. Ryan Alexander's history class, Professor Mandeville with his students from Clinton Community College, Lake Forest Retirement Community, board and staff from Rokeby's Museum, and Dr. Renee Horton a Space Launch System Quality Engineer with NASA. We did several school tours, also.

Our museum will need volunteers for the 2024 open season, as docents. Since the pandemic, we've tried to have at least 2 volunteers as docents. It's to protect our visitors and docents. If you're interested especially in history, I would encourage you to sign up by emailing us at [ugr@frontier.com](mailto:ugr@frontier.com). Training is provided as a group session in the spring and one on one with a docent during your time at the museum. We are not expecting anyone to be able to know a lot about our history. We have material docents can use and the exhibits give clues to information to provide

The farm formerly owned by Stephen Keese Smith, an abolitionist, was sold this year. Frank and Jack Perusse returned to Massachusetts to be near their family, as their health was declining. They sold the home to two sisters, Heidi and Mary, from Texas, who are making repairs to it. The sisters are still in Texas and believe renovations will take about 2 years to complete. The Association will still have access to the barn with the hidden room. We set up a GoFundMe page in hopes that we would raise enough money to purchase it. We raised over \$2,000 and those funds may be used, if we get the opportunity to purchase the barn with the hidden room.

I'm continuing as a community member on the Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Advisory Committee which is an initiative of SUNY Plattsburgh's joint Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Work. I'm an Advisory board member for AARCH and PBS and a member of MLK committee

We've received a grant from Essex for the Colors of Freedom Juneteenth program in the amount of \$800. This year we gave the first Colors of Freedom Award to Dr. Dexter

## **President's Report for the 2023 Annual Meeting**

Crisis as part of the Juneteenth program. This award recognizes businesses, individuals, or organizations that.

Attended the plaque unveiling at Shadrack Minkin's gravesite located at Mount Royal Cemetery and Funeral Complex outside of Montreal.

The following programs were produced this year; Colors of Freedom in the North Country for Juneteenth holiday and Women's Equity Day. The Colors of Freedom was a collaboration with John Brown Lives, John Brown Farm, Elizabethtown and Adirondack Museum. Women's Equity Day was a collaboration with Clinton County Historical Association.

I presented at Professor's John McMahon's class, Black Solidarity Day at SUNY Plattsburgh, Black History Month at SUNY Plattsburgh for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion program, Bare Hill Correctional Facility, the Champlain Valley Retired Educators meeting, Anderson Falls and Adirondack History museums. I did a re-enactment of Ida B. Wells for Delta Kappa Gamma's tea.

The brook near the former home of John Thomas which was called Negro Brook had a name change to the John Thomas Brook courtesy of Curtis Stager. I wrote a letter of support from our organization. A celebration for the name change occurred on September 16. There will be a new exhibit in the John Thomas room as a result of this name change.

We've obtained the Network to Freedom status for the Archive at the North Star Underground Railroad Museum from the National Parks Service.

In the Spring our museum worked with 4 interns. Allison, from SUNY Plattsburgh history department, who scanned documents in our Archives to put them into digital format so they can be preserved and accessible online in the future. She also worked at the Peru Historian's office. Aidan, Bruce and Teagan from the Anthropology department who worked to revise the Northward to Freedom video so that it would appeal to younger adults. The title of the revised video is Escape to the North: A Journey to Freedom.

This semester, we have 2 interns, Nate and Teagan, SUNY Plattsburgh. They are continuing the work on the Northward to Freedom video and will be including Neal Burdick, the great-great grandson of Stephen Keese Smith and Jim Stafford, who lived at the farm with the hidden room. I worked with a virtual intern from Skidmore College, Willa, who was instrumental in putting together a booklet for our Juneteenth celebration.

The museum was featured this year on NBC News, Strictly Business magazine, in the DEI first newsletter on SUNY Plattsburgh, a film that is being produced by MuseumHue

# **President's Report for the 2023 Annual Meeting**

(an organization working to get BIPOC organizations more funding and support from New York's government), a blog from I Love New York, and the North Country Living publication.

## **Video:**

Explainer video about the project: [https://youtu.be/M3JaStlFu\\_I](https://youtu.be/M3JaStlFu_I)

The musical documentary movie: <https://youtu.be/TS4h-8cbCKE>

## **Nominations and Election of Board Trustees:**

We will now vote on the 2023/2024 Board members. On the ballot we have Robin Caudell,

## **Closing Comments:**

We have refreshments, so please help yourself.

I would like to thank you for attending our Annual Meeting for 2023. Have a safe and wonderful Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

## **Closing Song:**

Oh Freedom – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veiJLhXdwn8>