

President's Report June 2010-June 2011

June 18, 2011

2011 will go down in history as the year we moved into our upstairs offices at the Town of Chesterfield Visitors Center and began managing the Center and North Star Underground Railroad Museum for the town. It was immensely rewarding to me to wash the twenty-one windows of the center in preparation for our Dedication. The Center and Museum are beyond our expectations. We will be forever grateful to Town Supervisor Gerald Morrow for seeing the project through to its completion.

As has happened so many times over the last seven years, still another person came to us with the very skills we needed. A friend of many years, Arbey Arce, visited the center when it was still a work in progress and pronounced it a "noble work." Arbey then volunteered to be our "official graphic artist." Arbey was soon busy designing our annual appeal card, redesigning our logo and creating a striking promotional brochure. Most recently, he created a winning TShirt design for our gift shop.

Yolanda and Frank Kinnelly planted flowers to beautify the museum. But when they went to water the seeds, there was no outside water. Thank goodness we had a lot of rain. Jerry Morrow came to the rescue, and arranged for a line to be installed. Water is now flowing, just in time for the summer's heat.

Vice-President Jackie Madison continued to ably Chair the Development Committee, and, at a moment's notice, wrote a beautiful presentation for the dedication of the Rouses Point Wayside exhibit. In fact, Jackie's presentation was so wonderful, we asked her to do a reprise at the May 14th ribbon cutting for the Heritage Center/Museum. We lost our webmaster, Beth Barns, but Jackie soon found a wonderful replacement-- Jill McKee. Jackie and Jill have revamped our site so it is more user friendly.

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Vice-President Frank Kinnelly organized volunteers to paint the interior of the Center. The volunteers donated over 500 hours. Frank succeeded in increasing our memberships. And his Finance Committee developed ways to help us monitor our income and expenses.

Helen Allen did such a great job assisting us, we changed her job title from Administrative Assistant to Assistant to the President. Helen has been our SCSEP (Senior Community Service Employment Program) for more than a year. Without Helen's assistance, we would not be able to operate the museum. She has organized a great team of docents. And, with the help of her cousin, Carol Allen, she has set up a very successful gift shop.

We sadly accepted Lita Kelly's resignation from our Board of Trustees. And we will miss Jim Bailey who decided not to run for reelection. Jim is an avid mountaineer, and we wish him many happy climbs.

We are already benefiting from Linda Richardson's decision to retire from the Saranac Central School District. Linda created a terrific Scavenger Hunt—a series of questions for young visitors based on our museum exhibit panels. Linda will be supervising an intern this summer who will be leading children's activities. She will also be getting our educational trunks ready for classroom use next year.

The character of our Board of Trustee meetings changed this past year. The work of our committees and their Chairs became our primary focus. I became less of a solo player and more of a director. I often felt like I was leading an orchestra. It was a good feeling.

In the coming year I will team with our first Vice-President, Jackie Madison, to strengthen our Board and our committees. In the next six months, we will be working closely with Robert Bull, a National Trust for Historic Preservation sponsored facilitator whose expertise will help us take concrete steps to strengthen our Board. We will create a common job description for our Board members and specific job descriptions for each member. We will organize a Board retreat. Now that the museum is open, we need to assess where we have been, understand where we are, and agree on new strategies and how we will implement them.

We must make the job of our President more of a managerial position than it has been. We have given life to an inspiring museum. We have established a solid foundation for our work. Now we must strengthen our organization so that we can meet new challenges. We need to bolster our existing committees and develop our program, publicity and historic sites and S..K. Smith barn restoration committees and recruit a committee of volunteers to help Yolanda and Frank with our flower garden. Helen's SCSEP position will end in the Spring of 2012. We must raise funds to keep her on the job.

We need to accomplish all of these tasks, so I can turn my attention to writing, for I have a 2012 publisher's deadline. The time has come for us to prepare the way for a new president.

Highlights

-Andy Black's exploratory archaeological dig with SUNY Plattsburgh and SUNY Potsdam students at the former Stephen Keese Smith farm in Peru, New York, was wonderful for everyone.

World premier of Melissa Waddy-Thibodeaux's "Story of Lavinia Bell" at SUNY Plattsburgh and in Montreal, Canada, for the NCC/Charles H. Este Community Center was a great success.

The dedication of the Wayside panel recognizing the old Rouses Point Steamboat Landing as one of the most significant stops on the Underground Railroad in the Champlain Valley was a true, community celebration.

The completion of Heritage Center and our move into our new offices upstairs made us all glow.

The Ribbon Cutting, Dedication and Grand Opening of the North Star Underground Railroad Museum were moments we will all remember.

Development Committee Report

Jackie Madison, Chair

1. Created a development plan to include long range activities and worked on potential grant sources.
2. Will utilize street money as a fund raising option in 2012.
3. Recommended a Board workshop and an Advisory committee, which would meet annually, that includes representatives from the 7 counties we represent.
4. I obtained 2 training grants, one from MuseumWise and one from National Historic Trust Preservation.
5. Frank applied for a grant from TD Bank. He received 500.00 for a Bulletin Board.
6. Created a grants' table for potential donors.
7. Due to the museum opening, the committee meetings were placed on hold in April and May. We will meet again June 30.

Membership and Finance Report

Frank Kinnelly, Chair

The Finance Committee was established by the Board last April with the purposes of working with the Treasurer to prepare the annual budget and providing guidance on financial matters to the Treasurer. The committee's responsibilities have also included the assurance of internal controls over financial procedures, to assure that they comply with commonly-accepted financial practice. The committee recently drew up guidelines for the procedures used by the Board and the President in making financial expenditures. In other actions, the committee reviewed the association's flow of funds and recommended that a share of the funds in our checking account should be moved into an investment account with the bank. The committee also provided support and guidance to the Assistant to the President in setting up a Quickbooks program for handling the Association's accounts.

Last year we had slightly more than 100 members. We now have 135. Our immediate goal is to have 150. We are pleased that our museum docents who were not already members are joining.

Education Committee
Linda Richardson, Chair

North Country Underground Railroad Historical Museum was able to obtain a \$1500 grant through the Education Committee from the United Way of the Adirondack Region July 2010. During this past year we have been developing “history in a trunk” that will go into the schools. It is planned that an educator from the museum will introduce the trunk in the school, leave it for exploration for teachers and students to use lessons, literature, costumes, puppets, videos, and websites to enrich the students with diversity in our culture and to teach that all people are equal, should be treated fairly and with respect and to recognize that all people have something to offer in our society.

The past year has been spent on developing lessons, researching and acquiring literature, preparing to make costumes and puppets, and introducing the idea to teachers in the surrounding area who were taking courses at SUNY Plattsburgh. June 10th we entertained 56 second graders and their teachers from Keeseville Elementary School at the Museum as a culminating experience in studying the Underground Railroad. June 16th we entertained 70 fourth graders at the Museum from Plattsburgh’s Momot Elementary School. Beginning July 12 and running Thursday, Friday, and Saturdays we will be holding outdoor education lessons and activities about the Underground Railroad for children from 12:30- 3:30PM through August at the Museum on the deck outside. We have a student in Education from SUNY Plattsburgh who will be doing an Independent Study under my supervision through the college working 45 hours for her 3 credits. We will begin sending the educational trunk into the schools this fall.