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Evaluating the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program of the National Park Service

Abstract

Following the end of the Civil War, Americans used the legend of the Underground Railroad as evidence of the country's morality before the abolishment of slavery. Using oral history, historians substantiated the common narrative of white abolitionists aiding fugitive slaves into the mid-twentieth century. With the Civil Rights Movement and the growth of social history, this narrative was re-evaluated. In 1995, a Special Resource Study for the National Park Service determined that the Underground Railroad was not being recognized or preserved adequately. Following the recommendations of the study, the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act of 1998 was passed. This thesis evaluates the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program through three cases studies, in order to determine if it is an effective model for commemorating and preserving non-traditional sites, like those of the Underground Railroad.

Keywords

integrity, documentation, folklore, criteria, National Register

Disciplines

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EVALUATING THE NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NETWORK TO
FREEDOM PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Lauren Elizabeth Burton

A THESIS

in

Historic Preservation

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in
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INTRODUCTION

The Underground Railroad is a distinct part of American history with mythical status similar to Manifest Destiny, the Gold Rush, and the Great Depression. Largely deceptive, the typical imagery of fugitive slaves escaping to the North with the aid of white abolitionists, secret codes, and underground tunnels, represents more about the history of American folklore and public sentiment than the true nature of the Underground Railroad. While we retrospectively learn and scrutinize America's history, our current events and societal values develop new interpretations of the past. Historians examine the way that history was once interpreted and the biases of the writers who influenced or wrote the predominant narratives. Likewise, the preservation movement in the United States continues to improve its tactics, inclusivity, and goals by reassessing past initiatives, advocacy campaigns, and viewpoints. As such, it is a natural progression to evaluate both historiography and established historic preservation programs simultaneously, as the National Park Service did with the 1995 Underground Railroad Special Resource Study.

In the mid-twentieth century, the Underground Railroad underwent a radical retelling, as historians disputed the romanticization of slaves escaping to find freedom. During that same era, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 passed, establishing strong policy for the recognition and preservation of sites. With the historic preservation field progressing into 1990, Americans called for an evaluation of Underground Railroad preservation with the federal legislation for a Special Resource Study. The noticeable absence of Underground Railroad sites on the National Register of Historic Places underlined the issues of preserving

the Underground Railroad on the physical landscape of America. With the main challenges of documentation and integrity, the Advisory Committee recommended a new model program for these unconventional sites.

Established under the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* Act of 1998, this program sought to preserve sites of significance and to develop an accurate interpretation of the Underground Railroad in America. Sixteen years later, the program is mature and well-utilized by hundreds of sites, but has the program successfully done what it was organized to do? This thesis is an examination of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom's* role in preserving sites of poor integrity and difficult documentation. Using a methodology of two phases, first with research, interviews, and data collection, followed with analysis, this thesis sets out to determine if the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* is a program that can be utilized by unconventional sites in future National Park Service and historic preservation initiatives.

DEFINING THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

From America's first permanent settlement at Jamestown in 1619, enslaved Africans became part of the labor force in the New World. As Native Americans died of disease and indentured servitude dissipated, the enslaved Africans' skin color further defined their status in the developing colonies. New enterprise flourished in the soil of the Americas, including the cultivation of rice, tobacco, and cotton, and the Black population rose dramatically to meet the demands of the economy. All over the colonies, both North and South, slaves were present on the landscape, but because of the agricultural economy, their population became densest in the South. In 1680, Connecticut had thirty slaves, but shortly before the Revolution, that number had grown to 6,500. More dramatically, from 1680 to 1750, Virginia's black population rose from 7 to 44 percent while South Carolina's 17 to 61 percent.¹ As explained by Fergus M. Bordewich in *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America*, "To return maximum value to their owners, slaves, like any expensive tools, had to be properly maintained... when they failed to perform, they had to be punished."²

The slavery system of Colonial America developed an enslaved population with psychological, emotional, and physical burdens to endure. In *Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad*, Larry Gara clarifies how some slaves may have not necessarily have had a yearning for freedom throughout their lives. Those who ran away left for various reasons, often returning after a short period of time, depending on their own circumstances. Through

¹ Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America* (New York: Amistad, 2005), 16.

² Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 23.

anecdotes, Gara shows that there were numerous motives for slaves to run away, including the dread of being sold to a new master, separation from family, and fear of punishment. Unless captured, runaways often returned because of starvation or because they could see no other way of life. Gara explains the difference between these average slaves and those who actually sought freedom, “For [fugitive slaves], running away was a logical solution. They were the misfits in the system, and their best adjustment was to leave it altogether. The decision to leave was not to be taken lightly.”³

These fugitive slaves, “the misfits in the system” went both North and South to find freedom. In the South, the geography was familiar and slaves could be found near the plantations of their old owners or hiding in the swamps and forests. Runaway slaves also hid in Southern cities, where they were less conspicuous amid a larger population and freedmen. Some slaves even joined Native American tribes like the Florida Seminoles or founded their own hidden encampments in Southern territory, as many did in the Great Dismal Swamp, which encompasses parts of Virginia and North Carolina.⁴

Those slaves that decided to head north used the North Star to guide them to the free states and Canada. Gara asserts that many slaves knew nothing of the abolitionists’ aid and took on the journey independently.⁵ Known today as the Underground Railroad, historian Charles L. Blockson defines it as “a vast informal network of activists, black and white, who aided

³ Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), 41.

⁴ Larry Gara, “Slavery and Freedom,” *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), 19-42.

⁵ Lara Gara, *The Liberty Line*, 44.

escaping slaves in the decades before the Civil War.”⁶ Bordewich explains that until the 1820s, only the activity in southeastern Pennsylvania resembled what decades later became known as the Underground Railroad.⁷ The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 permitted warrants for the arrest and return of any African-American that someone contended to be a fugitive. As free Blacks were kidnapped, Pennsylvania enacted a law in March of 1820 in order to combat the Fugitive Slave Act and passed an even tougher one in 1826. Pennsylvania’s antislavery activities, Bordewich describes, were “a kind of synergy...developing in a region that would become perhaps the most supportive of the underground in the United States.”⁸

Starting in the 1830s, anti-slavery groups started to form throughout the free states and Quakers, as well as other Christian denominations, became an enormous part of the anti-slavery movement. In December 1833, abolitionists held their first national conference in Philadelphia, showing the growth towards unity in a movement that had been scattered throughout America. Bordewich encapsulates the abolitionists’ unification and their developing role in the Underground Railroad:

In the middle years of the 1830s, abolitionism was transformed from a sentiment, a set of beliefs held by a small number of men and women in the Northern states, and upon which even fewer were prepared to act, into an organized national movement, an expanding array of antislavery societies whose members would provide the white rank and file of the Underground Railroad, linking them together with isolated cells and African-American communities into a system that, in time, would spread across more than a dozen states.⁹

After its founding in 1833, the American Anti-Slavery Society started their lobbying

⁶ Charles L. Blockson, "Escape from Slavery: The Underground Railroad," *National Geographic*, July 1984, 1.

⁷ Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 133.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

campaigns to spread abolitionist ideology and support. Through these organized public rallies and meetings, the Underground Railroad's network was strengthened as individuals connected through their similar beliefs.¹⁰ Bordewich notes that Southerners responded by associating fugitive slaves and the secret network with the abolitionist movement. He also states that by the 1830s, because of the rise of these abolitionist organizations, the Underground Railroad was taking a distinct shape.¹¹ Vigilance Committees were formed as part of the antislavery societies, with African Americans as active members.¹² In the Ohio River Valley, the Underground Railroad expanded quickly as "disillusionment with the national parties focused the growth of the Underground Railroad as more and more Americans became willing to break laws that they believed to be sinful but impossible to change by political means."¹³

As the abolitionist movement expanded and the focus on ending slavery endured, Southerners began to worry. In 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act passed, strengthening the previous Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, demanding the return of fugitive slaves as a way to appease concerned Southerners. Despite the new law, passionate abolitionists remained conductors on the Underground Railroad and, as Henry Gibb, an African American journalist, wrote, "The Fugitive Slave Law has given it more vitality, more activity, more passengers, and more opposition, which invariably accelerates business."¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid., 155-156.

¹¹ Ibid., 164.

¹² Ibid., 172.

¹³ Ibid., 196.

¹⁴ Ibid., 343.

Until the Civil War and in spite of the Fugitive Slave Act, the Underground Railroad remained strong. John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, when Brown unsuccessfully attempted to start a slave revolt, as well as "Bleeding Kansas" were decisive points leading up to the Civil War. Once Congress declared war in 1861, following the election of Abraham Lincoln and the secession of the Southern states, "without quite meaning to do so, the federal government had undertaken the work of the Underground Railroad on a scale that would help destroy the plantation economy of the Confederacy."¹⁵ Thus, the participants of the Underground Railroad refocused their attention on the war efforts to ensure the eradication of slavery.

¹⁵ Ibid., 430.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD IN AMERICAN MEMORY

Given its very nature as a secretive and largely undocumented network, historians have struggled with difficulties of validating the truth underlying the mythical lore of the Underground Railroad. That lore is especially problematic when documenting authentic Underground Railroad activity at historic sites. In *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory*, several authors contribute enlightening essays on the subject. Historian David W. Blight's chapter "The Underground Railroad, and Why Now? A Long View," explores how historians have written about the Underground Railroad since its existence. In his essay, Blight points out one of the essential problems with understanding the Underground Railroad and its documentation when he states, "Although extremely valuable in aggregates and as a reflection of memory, oral history should be used with caution if it is the only source for retelling human experience and for judging the legitimacy of events in historic places."¹⁶ The Underground Railroad's evidence is largely in human memory, because as an illegal activity those involved destroyed the documents that could condemn them. Historically, understanding the Underground Railroad has been a complex battle between romanticism and reality.

As the first piece examining the intricacies of the Underground Railroad, and not solely comprised of anecdotes, Wilbur H. Siebert's *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* shed unprecedented light on the subject at the time of its publication in 1898. Starting in 1895, Siebert, a history professor at Ohio State University, began to document the

¹⁶ David W. Blight, "The Underground Railroad, and Why Now? A Long View," in *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books in Association with the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, 2006), 235.

Underground Railroad by collecting new proof of its existence. In order to begin researching the Underground Railroad, Siebert sent thousands of letters Northern residents asking for information about those who aided fugitive slaves. Mostly white abolitionists received these letters and, romanticizing their past, painted a depiction of themselves as the heroic liberators to fugitive slaves.¹⁷ His book would rely heavily on these belated testimonials and, in addressing his reliance on them, he states:

If there be doubt on this point, it must give way before the manner in which statements gathered from different localities during the last five years articulate together, the testimony of different and sometimes widely separated witnesses combining to support one another.¹⁸

Siebert's book, therefore, is entirely what Blight warns against. Blight argues in his examination of Siebert's book, that it "is an essential source both for the reality of the process by which fugitive slaves achieved freedom, as well as for how and why so much mythology has flourished around this story."¹⁹ Another pitfall of Siebert's book, which would ultimately become a prevailing myth of the Underground Railroad, is that he "cultivated the soil of Northern memory and fashioned a popular story of primarily white conductors helping generally nameless blacks to freedom."²⁰ This would provide a lasting vision of brave whites aiding slaves, in order to diffuse the notion of nationwide racism before and after the Civil War.

Roughly sixty years later, in 1961, Larry Gara's *Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* set out to debunk the lore that had developed in American sentiment. Gara begins

¹⁷ . Blight, "The Underground Railroad, and Why Now? A Long View," 237-241.

¹⁸ Wilbur Henry Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), 11.

¹⁹ Blight, "The Underground Railroad, and Why Now? A Long View," 237.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 239.

his book with “The Legendary Road,” which starts to unravel the fallacies. He explains that the anti-slavery rhetoric of Northern Abolitionists and the speeches of angry Southern politicians laid the foundation for the Underground Railroad’s mythical nature. As an illegal activity, Americans sensationalized runaway slaves’ actions. Once the Civil War ended and fugitive slaves no longer needed to hide, the publication of abolitionist writings fostered the tale. Wilbur H. Siebert’s *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* authenticated the lore well into the late nineteenth century.²¹

Gara asserts that the slaves that did escape were reliant mostly upon themselves throughout the journey, and that abolitionists, although a part of the Underground Railroad, did not play the prominent role portrayed in legend. Moreover, participating abolitionists did not face the consequences that fugitive slaves encountered if captured. These abolitionists, often represented as Quakers, were not in fact the primary outlaws or conductors of the Underground Railroad. Rather, it was mainly slaves being aided by freedmen or working independently. Blight summarizes this point when he states, “Perhaps above all, Gara redirected historical attention to the fugitive slave as an individual who required a stunning degree of courage and self-reliance in order to seek or achieve freedom.”²²

Recent historians have continued to de-mystify the Underground Railroad. Published in 1999, John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger’s *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*, further shaped the reality of fugitives slaves in the Antebellum South. Franklin and

²¹ Ibid., 243.

²² Ibid., 243.

Schweninger collected and organized the information they found in 2,000 newspaper advertisements for runaway slaves from 1790 to 1816 and 1838 to 1860. From these written documents, the authors found that a substantial number of slaves attempted to resist their situation for a range of reasons. Of the majority, those who fled were male field hands in their late teens and twenties.²³ Their study focused on the actual runaways themselves, rather than the white men who aided them in the legendary Underground Railroad tale. As Blight explains, “contrary to so many of the stories Siebert received from white respondents, real fugitive slaves had actual names and identities – they had real stories.”²⁴

In 2005, a year after Blight’s essay in *Passages to Freedom*, Fergus M. Bordewich published his book *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America*. Bordewich, addressing the Underground Railroad in the wake of Gara, begins by acknowledging that “because the Underground Railroad was secretive, and because much of its story has been forgotten, or deliberately suppressed, its memory has sheered away into myth and legend like no other piece of our history.”²⁵ In his examination of the Underground Railroad, Bordewich continues to deflate the legend of white abolitionists saving the fugitive slaves. He does not renounce the role of abolitionists as heavily as Gara did, but rather takes an approach that finds more balanced ground. Fugitive slaves, overall, were largely on their own in their journey towards freedom, wherever that may have been. Borderwich compares the role of abolitionist societies and member involvement as evidence of Underground Railroad

²³ John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 232.

²⁴ Blight, "The Underground Railroad, and Why Now? A Long View," 243.

²⁵ Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 3.

conductors as “no more proof of participation in the Underground Railroad than belonging to the Sierra Club means that one would personally sabotage lumber company equipment in the forests of the Pacific Northwest.”²⁶ Additionally, he points out that numerous slaves did not venture north but eluded capture while remaining in the south and that Northerners were not all-accepting of freedmen.

²⁶ Ibid., 162.

AFRICAN AMERICANS AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The 1961 publication of Larry Gara's *Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* was representative of a larger movement occurring in the history field. With the onset of the Civil Rights Movement, social history became an area of interest for a growing number of historians. Social history examines everyday people and their experiences. Prior to this shift, the typical approach of historians was to highlight white males who held powerful positions, known as "traditional history." With the development of revisionist history, historians looked to more broadly define the American experience in an objective light, examining historical and social forces "from the bottom up." Part of that focus was on African Americans and became known as the "black studies movement." As James O. Horton explains,

African-American history resists comfortable incorporation into the traditional American story. The black historical experience challenges the validity of that story and demands that it be altered significantly... Thus, initial efforts to 'integrate' American history into texts and into the National Register have generally amounted to little more than the inclusion of a careful selection of those places and characters that have most closely conformed to traditional interpretations.²⁷

For success in integrating the African-American experience into American history, scholars needed to avoid the same protocol of "traditional history" and the approach of looking solely at prominent figures.²⁸

While historians were changing their approach, Congress passed the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and formally declared the importance of preserving historic places

²⁷ Beth L. Savage and Carol D. Shull, *African American Historic Places* (Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1994), 19.

²⁸ Savage and Shull, *African American Historic Places*, 20.

for American public interest. This Act created the National Register of Historic Places and gave the Secretary of the Interior the duty of maintaining the National Register and its criteria. The National Register of Historic Places is “composed of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture” and recognizes places that should be preserved.²⁹ Like the progression of the history field, the historic preservation movement began by focusing on the structures of noteworthy and prominent white males, but would later come to see that focus as misleading and overly exclusive.

In accordance with these broad trends, preservationists began to see the need for diversity within preservation efforts. State agencies, particularly in the South, began to incorporate new initiatives for the inclusion of African-American heritage. Along with state initiatives, the National Park Service started targeting its lack of diversity with the 1974 National Historic Landmark Theme Study on Black Americans in United States History.³⁰ In 1992, the National Trust for Historic Preservation held its annual conference with the theme of diversity at the forefront of discussion.³¹ However, as of December 31, 1993, of the 63,000 properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places, only 800 involved African-American heritage.³² Further National Park Service initiatives were imperative in order to see that the agency fulfilled its duty to “present factual and balanced presentations of the many

²⁹ "National Historic Preservation Act of 1966," National Park Service, http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/FHPL_HistPrsvt.pdf.

³⁰ The National Park Service conducts theme studies in order to identify new National Historic Landmarks that focus on an aspect of history.

³¹ Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the past and Future of Historic Preservation* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 90-91.

³² Savage and Shull, *African American Historic Places*, 9-11.

American cultures, heritages, and histories.”³³

³³ Kaufmann, *Place, Race, and Story*, 76.

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY

In 1990, following the 1984 publication of Charles L. Blockson's widely influential article, "Escape from Slavery: The Underground Railroad" in *National Geographic*, Pennsylvania Representative Peter Kostmayer and Illinois Senator Paul Simon introduced legislation intended to lead to the examination of possibilities for Underground Railroad commemoration.³⁴ Known as Public Law 101-628, the legislation passed on November 28, 1990 and required the National Park Service to study "how to best interpret and commemorate the Underground Railroad, emphasizing the approximate routes taken by slaves escaping to freedom before the Civil War," to publish an interpretive handbook, and to create an Advisory Committee. The National Park Service study's objectives were to:

- consider the establishment of a new unit of the national park system
- consider the establishment of various appropriate designations for those routes and sites used by the Underground Railroad
- consider alternative means to link those sites, including those in Canada and Mexico
- make recommendations for cooperative agreements with state and local governments, local historical organizations, and other entities
- provide cost estimates for each alternative³⁵

Starting in 1992, in compliance with the legislation, the National Park Service contacted various stakeholders, including state historic preservation offices, academics, historical organizations, and others to assemble information on the places of the Underground Railroad. The National Park Service also distributed over 12,000 brochures detailing the project and asking for comments. A workshop was held between October 4 and 5 during the

³⁴ Underground Railroad Special Resource Study (Denver, CO: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1995), 3.

³⁵ Underground Railroad Special Resource Study, 132.

yearly meeting for the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. With the participation of Underground Railroad and African-American history experts, the workshop established key findings for determining the scope of the study:

- The Underground Railroad story includes the history of the institution of slavery and resistance to slavery.
- The Underground Railroad story links historical themes related to slavery and the African American experience in particular and American history in a broader sense.
- The peak period of Underground Railroad operation was 1830-1865.
- The Underground Railroad was not a simple route north, but reflects network patterns and complex connections to Native American tribes, Mexico, Canada, and the Caribbean.
- The story focus will be on people who fled bondage and on those who offered aid.
- Many types of resources are associated with the Underground Railroad, including routes, buildings, landscapes, artifacts, music, language, literature, and communities.³⁶

After the workshop, the Secretary of the Interior finalized the Underground Railroad Advisory Committee. This committee included three experts in African-American history: Dr. Thomas Battle, Dr. John Fleming, and Dr. Ancella Brickley; two experts in historic preservation: Dr. Charles L. Blockson and Barbara A. Hudson; one expert in American history: Dr. Robin Winks; and three members of the public: Vivian Abdur-Rahim, Rose Powhatan (Pamunkey) and Glennette Turner. Detailed in a public newsletter, the committee met over the next three years, for a total of six times, including one work session. Their gatherings developed strategies for commemorating, interpreting, and preserving the Underground Railroad and the sites involved in the secret network. Additionally, the committee formulated plans for public involvement, newsletters, the interpretive handbook,

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

interpretive themes, and a National Historic Landmark Study.³⁷

Following the requirements of Public Law 101-628, a Special Resource Study was conducted.

The administrative purpose of such a Special Resource Study is to assess new additions to the National Park System. For entry into the National Park System, the proposed site must fulfill criteria in all of three categories: national significance, suitability, and feasibility.

National significance is equal to being eligible for National Historic Landmark status and, of the sites on the National Register at the time of the study, “not one of these units has the primary responsibility for interpretation, preservation, and commemoration of the

Underground Railroad story.”³⁸ Thus, in conjunction with the Special Resource Study, a

National Historic Landmark Theme Study was completed and identified 42 sites eligible for National Historic Landmark status from an initial list of 380 sites. 12 Sites were nominated and approved for National Historic Landmark status by August 6, 1998. These sites fit into one or more of the nine categories laid out in the theme study:

1. “Stations” on the Underground Railroad
2. Properties associated with prominent persons
3. Slave rebellion sites
4. Properties associated with legal challenges to slavery
5. Properties associated with documented fugitive rescues
6. Churches associated with congregations active in the Underground Railroad
7. Maroon communities
8. Archeological sites
9. Others that hold an association with the Underground Railroad

Transportation routes were purposefully excluded from these categories, because integrity is likely to have been lost completely, routes were unique to each fugitive slave, and no

³⁷ Ibid., 5.

³⁸ Ibid., 10.

“physical imprint on the landscape” was left behind.³⁹

In order to be eligible for this National Historic Landmark Theme Study, the property must have the necessary documentation, but given the very nature of the Underground Railroad, this process can be especially difficult. The National Park Service published a handbook for guiding this documentation entitled *Exploring a Common Past: Researching and Interpreting the Underground Railroad*, clarifying how to use primary sources. These primary sources include oral traditions, biographies and memoirs, local histories, county and township records, city directories, almanacs, and gazetteers, calendars, images and photographs, foreign documents, “records of anti-slavery societies, vigilance committees, benevolent groups, churches, contemporary newspapers and periodicals,” legal documents and court records, manuscript collections, and maps. The use of oral tradition as a principal source of information is difficult and it is necessary to “document them with other historical evidence and evaluate their usefulness and credibility on a case-by-case basis.”⁴⁰

With the conclusion of the Advisory Committee’s meetings in August of 1995, five options (A-E) for commemoration were decided upon and an environmental assessment was completed for each option. The committee advised that the options be pursued collectively.

These five options are:

A: At a newly established commemorative, interpretive, educational, and research center, visitors would come to understand the whole story of the Underground

³⁹ Underground Railroad Resources in the U.S. Theme Study, PDF, Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1995.

⁴⁰ "Using Primary Sources: The Historians Toolbox," *Exploring a Common Past: Researching and Interpreting the Underground Railroad*, http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/ugrr/exugrr1.htm.

Railroad and its significance in their area or region and in United States history. Resources related to the Underground Railroad would be fully inventoried and documented.

B: An appreciation of the Underground Railroad would be accomplished by improving existing interpretive programs and by implementing new programs that would provide visitors with a complete, in-depth understanding of the Underground Railroad while focusing on local aspects of the story of the site.

C: Visitors would have an opportunity to encounter a concentration of Underground Railroad resources over a large geographic area (up to several hundred miles). These areas could include National Historic Landmarks and existing NPS units associated with the Underground Railroad story, documented escape routes used by enslaved Americans, structures and sites associated with personalities and aspects of the Underground Railroad story, various landscapes significant to the Underground Railroad story, and opportunities to illustrate the international connection to the Underground Railroad.

D: The history, meaning, significance, and legacy of the Underground Railroad would be remembered through a single commemorative monument. This monument would honor those people who risked or lost their lives to escape the oppression of slavery and reach freedom on the Underground Railroad and those who assisted them.

E: Visitors would have an opportunity to travel along trail systems that evoke the perilous experience encountered by those who sought freedom through escape on the Underground Railroad. A variety of natural resources (e.g., swamps, forests, and rivers) and cultural resources (e.g., Underground Railroad stations, homes of significant individuals, and archeological sites) along these trail systems would help to bring this story alive. A trail or trails would be designated through the National Trails System Act of 1968, as amended. One option in implementing concept E would be to establish a government-chartered commission or foundation to work toward establishment of the trail(s).⁴¹

On August 11, 1995, the Advisory Committee recommended that Congress develop an Underground Railroad Commission and fund projects associated with the clandestine network's interpretation, pursue each of the A-E options collectively, develop public and private partnerships to further Underground Railroad initiatives, and use historians outside

⁴¹ Ibid., iv-v.

the National Park Service to write a handbook on the Underground Railroad.⁴² The study also produced important findings:

- The Underground Railroad story is nationally significant.
- A few elements of the story are represented in existing NPS units and other sites, but many important resource types are not adequately represented and protected.
- Many sites remain that meet established criteria for designation as national historic landmarks.
- Many sites are in imminent danger of being lost or destroyed.
- There is a tremendous amount of interest in the subject, but little organized coordination and communication among interested individuals and organizations.
- Some sites have very high potential for preservation and visitor use.
- No single site or route completely reflects and characterizes the Underground Railroad.
- The story and resources involve networks and regions rather than individual sites and trails.
- A variety of partnership approaches would be most appropriate for the protection and interpretation of the Underground Railroad. These partnerships could include the federal, state, and local governments along with a variety of private sector involvement.⁴³

⁴² Ibid., v.

⁴³ Underground Railroad Special Resource Study, iii.

THE NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NETWORK TO FREEDOM

Roughly three years later, on July 21, 1998, Congress acknowledged these recommendations and passed the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act* of 1998, Public Law 105–203. In section three of this act, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* is explained as a program that will consist of the relevant units already designated by the National Park Service, properties that are owned privately or by federal, state, and/or local agencies and that are on or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and facilities and programs (governmental or nongovernmental) that are related to Underground Railroad interpretation, research, and education. The Network to Freedom was intended to distribute educational information, develop partnerships for technical assistance, and adopt a symbol for identification of program inclusion. The act further authorized the Secretary of the Interior to form

cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding with, and provide technical assistance to the heads of other Federal agencies, States, localities, regional governmental bodies, and private entities; and in cooperation with the Secretary of State, the governments of Canada, Mexico, and any appropriate country in the Caribbean.

Lastly, the Network to Freedom was authorized to receive no more than \$500,000 from the Federal government each year.⁴⁴

Made up of sites, programs, and facilities, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, as National Coordinator Diane Miller explains, “focuses on the act of self-liberation, rather than the act of assistance, when defining the Underground Railroad” and covers the time frame from the beginning of colonization of North America to the passing of the

⁴⁴ Appendix A

Thirteenth Amendment. *The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* includes a variety of sites:

where escapes, rebellions, rescues, or kidnapping occurred, Maroon communities, sites related to fugitive slave acts, churches associated with active congregations, destination sites, landscape features such as caves or swamps, properties linked to prominent participants, military sites (including contraband encampments), and cemeteries. This list remains fluid to incorporate and encourage new and original investigations, interpretations, and commemorative activities around the country.⁴⁵

The sites, facilities, and programs partnered with the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* must have approval from their manager and/or owner and apply for inclusion. The applications are approved bi-annually with public meetings.⁴⁶ To be accepted to the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, sites can be actually be eligible or ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

As Miller explained when referring to the legislation's mention of National Register properties and the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*'s inclusion of those that are ineligible, "I don't want to say we chose to ignore, we spent a lot of time trying to wrestle with that whole idea and all that wording. So what we kind of came to, was that there needed to be at least something that would tell what this thing (a site or structure) was about."⁴⁷

Therefore, for those sites that are ineligible, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* requires some form of interpretation on the property so that visitors can understand the significance of the site, whereas sites on the National Register already convey that with

⁴⁵ Diane Miller, "The Places and Communities of the Underground Railroad: The National Park Service Network to Freedom," in *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Books in Association with the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, 2006), 282.

⁴⁶ Miller, "The Places and Communities of the Underground Railroad," 283.

⁴⁷ Diane Miller, "Interview with National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Coordinator," telephone interview by author, April 11, 2014.

their integrity, although further interpretation is recommended. The program acknowledges explicitly that although many sites of Underground Railroad importance are ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places, they are nevertheless significant, stating:

There are a multitude of Underground Railroad-related sites around the United States that have suffered the impacts of prolonged negligence or developments inconsistent with the historical character of the site. For whatever reasons, these past activities may have left the site ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places. Nonetheless, these sites are often integral parts of the Underground Railroad story. Their significance should not be lost, so the Network to Freedom is designed to include these impacted sites, with the provision that they must be associated with some type of documentation and interpretation.⁴⁸

The creation of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* provided the National Park Service with a means to recognize sites of Underground Railroad significance that did not have the level of integrity that National Register designation requires. However, the ineligible sites are not entitled to Section 106.⁴⁹

Following the passage of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act* in 1998, the legislation would be amended two more times. The 2001 amendment was in regard to recommendation A of the Special Resource Study's Advisory Committee and allocated the funds for the construction of the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. Ultimately, the construction of the Center would enable the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* to offer matching grants. The center had large support from backers like Proctor and Gamble, who hired lobbyists, and as part of the amendment's implementation, there would be funding for the *National Underground Railroad*

⁴⁸ National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Application Instructions, PDF, National Park Service.

⁴⁹ "Clarification: Section 106 Applicable to National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Members Ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places?," e-mail to Diane Miller, May 08, 2014.

Network to Freedom program to provide grants.⁵⁰

As stated in section 4(a) of the amendment, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* could provide grants, “for the preservation and restoration of historic buildings or structures associated with the Underground Railroad, and for related research and documentation to sites, programs, or facilities that have been included in the national network.” However, the money was not directly allocated for the program, as section 4(d) explains, “There are authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary for purposes of this section \$2,500,000 for fiscal year 2001 and each subsequent fiscal year. Amounts authorized but not appropriated in a fiscal year shall be available for appropriation in subsequent fiscal years.”⁵¹ Thus, grants have only been given out four times since the amendment was passed and the money is never reliable. Miller also point out that the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* has never received the full amount it was allocated in the initial legislation.⁵² In 2008, the legislation was amended again, adjusting the appropriated funding for higher operational funds and lowered grant funding.⁵³

⁵⁰ Miller, "Interview with National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Coordinator," April 11, 2014.

⁵¹ "National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Legislation," National Park Service, June 01, 2011, accessed May 06, 2014, http://www.nps.gov/subjects/ugrr/about_ntf/legislations.htm.

⁵² Miller, "Interview with National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Coordinator," April 11, 2014.

⁵³ "National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Legislation," National Park Service.

EVALUATING THE NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NETWORK TO FREEDOM

From March of 1993 to August of 1995, the Underground Railroad Advisory Committee worked to complete the Underground Railroad Special Resource Study. Their conclusions and recommendations would ultimately lead to the passage of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act* of 1998. The final Underground Railroad Advisory Committee report of 1995 stated:

Given the national significance of the story, the need for long-term preservation of resources, the public enjoyment potential, and the current amount of public ownership, the Underground Railroad story could become an example of the “new wave” national park unit – a cooperative or partnership park.⁵⁴

Almost sixteen years later, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* has matured into a formal program. As shown in the Special Resource Study, Underground Railroad sites often face issues of documentation and integrity that make them ineligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Judith Wellman, professor emeritus of the State University of New York at Oswego, was part of a 1998 project funded by the National Park Service to research Underground Railroad sites in Oswego County. The project involved several community members, historians, historic preservationists, and students seeking to answer: “could oral traditions about the Underground Railroad be documented through primary source research?” The project involved workshops, brochures, new historical markers, and research guides. The project members nominated 15 sites to the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*

⁵⁴ Underground Railroad Special Resource Study, iv.

and 11 sites to the National Register of Historic Places. Following the experience, Wellman wrote in 2002 about the difficulties with integrity of sites associated with the Underground Railroad and argued for the importance of National Register listings despite integrity, claiming:

that the National Register of Historic Places remains key to preserving and interpreting Underground Railroad sites in the context of U.S. history as a whole. Established in 1966, it is the only national agency responsible for maintaining a list of sites that represent “the major patterns of our shared local, State, and national experience.” ... In addition, National Register listing offers some protection to endangered places by limiting the adverse impact of federal funds.⁵⁵

After the publication, the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places refuted Wellman’s argument.

Carol D. Shull, then the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places, responded to Wellman with her own piece in *The Public Historian*. Shull points out that all National Register properties have changed over time, but what is important is that their significance is still apparent in their present-day condition. She also emphasizes that:

The National Register is not and cannot be a comprehensive listing of all the places that have been important in U.S. history and prehistory. We are the first to acknowledge that there are many places of great historical importance that can never be listed in the National Register, because there is simply not enough historic fabric left to convey that importance.

Shull argues in favor of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, because it is a program that highlights sites with poor integrity that “are often integral parts of the

⁵⁵ Judith Wellman, "The Underground Railroad and the National Register of Historic Places: Historical Importance vs. Architectural Integrity," *The Public Historian* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2002), JSTOR.

Underground Railroad story [and] their stories should not be lost.”⁵⁶

Along with the issues of integrity, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* must address the problem of documentation. As previously explained, because of its nature as a secretive network, documentation is frequently difficult for Underground Railroad sites. The National Park Service acknowledges the importance of oral history, but also requires other forms of documentation in order for a site to be listed on the National Register. In order to be listed on the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, sites must have a “verifiable association” with the Underground Railroad, and with evidence of their connection involving research and documentation. Sites are not approved for membership if their association only deals with anti-slavery advocacy, but instead must show actual participation within the Underground Railroad, defined by the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* as “efforts of enslaved African Americans to gain their freedom by escaping bondage.”⁵⁷

As the historic preservation field works towards more inclusivity and diversity, understanding the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*'s role in preservation of newly recognized and complex types of historic places is vital. Has the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* bridged the gap between sites designated to the National Register and those ineligible for the National Register? Has the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* in combination with National Register sites allowed the National Park Service to

⁵⁶ Carol D. Shull, "The Underground Railroad: Refining Eligibility Criteria," *The Public Historian* 24, no. 2 (Spring 2002).

⁵⁷ National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Application Instructions, PDF, National Park Service.

more fully and accurately reflect the history of the Underground Railroad, one that is less tainted by myth and lore? More importantly, has the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* become a model for the National Park Service, a possibility suggested by the Advisory Committee in 1995? Examining the history, documentation, integrity, and role of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* with three case studies can lead us to these answers.

CASE STUDY ONE: ABYSSINIAN MEETING HOUSE

Located at 73 Newberry Street in Portland, Maine, the Abyssinian Meeting House is the third oldest African-American meetinghouse in the United States.⁵⁸ Constructed in 1828, the original members sought a place for religious worship without the racial constraints they faced in existing congregations. Discriminated and often confined to the upper balcony of churches, free Blacks in Northern cities began to form their own congregations. In February 1828, twenty-eight African Americans founded the Abyssinian Religious Society, and built the Meeting House by April of that same year for their congregation. In 1840, the Abyssinian Religious Society formally sold the building to the congregation, making them responsible for maintenance of the structure.⁵⁹

A center for the Black community, the Abyssinian Meeting House was frequented by different sections of the population, especially wealthier African Americans. With racial boundaries still prevalent, members of the congregation became passionate advocates for the anti-slavery cause. After William Lloyd Garrison's momentous visit to the Abyssinian Meeting House in September of 1832, Samuel Fessenden formed the Portland Antislavery Society, and a statewide antislavery organization formed the next year. In 1842, the Portland Union Antislavery Society was founded at the Meeting House and included many of the congregation's members.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ "Abyssinian Meeting House," National Park Service, accessed March 27, 2014, <http://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/afam/2007/abyssinian.htm>.

⁵⁹ Mitchell, Christi A. Abyssinian Meeting House. United States Department of the Interior National Registration Form, Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta Maine, 3-5.

⁶⁰ Mitchell, Abyssinian Meeting House, 6-8.

In 1849, as the antislavery rhetoric continued to take hold, Lewis G. Clark, a runaway slave, told an Abyssinian Meeting House audience what he had endured, followed by a speech from Frederick Douglass. In 1853, the church's own Reverend told of his escape. The city of Portland became a haven for fugitive slaves heading out of the country. As stated in the National Register form,

The leaders and members of the Abyssinian Church actively participated in concealing, supplying, and transporting runaway slaves. While most of the Underground Railroad activity in and around Portland was led by local Quakers and white anti-slavery activists, the ministers and membership of the Abyssinian Meeting House played an active role.⁶¹

Sources mention Abyssinian members Charles Eastman, Dr. Addison Parson, and Reverends Amos Freeman and Amos Beman. The sole mention of the structure being used to shelter fugitive slaves is in an unpublished memoir by a descendent of Amos Freedman.⁶²

Following the Civil War, Portland's Great Fire of 1866 destroyed most of the public buildings. Luckily, the Abyssinian Meeting House was one of the few buildings to survive and was remodeled around 1870. The building continued to be used for various community needs until 1916. Eight years later it was converted into tenement apartments. In 1991, these apartments were condemned by the city.⁶³ As the enthusiasm for preservation of African-American structures grew at the end of the twentieth century, the public recognized the importance of this building, although it was not recognized in the Underground Railroad Special Resource Study. One Portland citizen, Deborah Cummings Kadraoui, upon reading about the vacant building in a local newspaper, became a passionate advocate for its

⁶¹ Ibid., 9.

⁶² Ibid., 8-9.

⁶³ "Abyssinian Meeting House," National Park Service.

preservation. In 1998, Kadraoui founded the Committee to Restore the Abyssinian and the organization bought the structure for \$250 from Portland, the original amount that was paid for the land in 1827.⁶⁴

As stated in the National Trust for Historic Preservation's publication *Preserving African American Historic Places*,

The Abyssinian Meeting House in Portland, Maine, was in a severely deteriorated condition by the time local activists realized its significance as an early African American meetinghouse. Original materials had been replaced and historical documentation was difficult to find. Public records, historic maps, and other forms of research were largely unavailable.⁶⁵

The Committee to Restore the Abyssinian, the City of Portland, and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission worked as partners to change the future of the Abyssinian Meeting House. From the beginning of their formation, the partnership acted to secure funding both for the stabilization of the structure and for the extensive and difficult research process.⁶⁶ Listed as a City of Portland Landmark and Maine Landmark in 2004, the advocates moved onward with national recognition to gain further support for the Abyssinian.⁶⁷ Architect John A. James's firm completed a Historic Structures Report on the Abyssinian Meeting House in March of 2005, providing the bulk of the National Register of Historic Places application completed by Christa A. Mitchell of the Maine Historic

⁶⁴ Katie Zezima, "In Maine, Restoring History Long Hidden," *The New York Times*, July 08, 2005, accessed April 20, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/09/national/09religion.html?_r=0.

⁶⁵ Brentt Leggs, Kerri Rubman, and Byrd Wood, "Preserving African American Historic Places," National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2012, 17, accessed April 20, 2014, http://www.preservationnation.org/forum/library/public-articles/PB_AfricanAmericanSites.pdf.

⁶⁶ Committee to Restore the Abyssinian, *The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom - Abyssinian Meeting House Application*, PDF, National Park Service.

⁶⁷ "Site Named First in Maine's Freedom Trail," *Maine's Bangor Daily News* (Bangor, Maine), October 31, 2007, B4 sec.

Preservation Commission.⁶⁸

This National Register nomination notes some of the difficulty with connecting this site with Underground Railroad activity and the potential for further research by stating:

Similarly, references to the participation of some of the church's members in abolitionist activities offers tantalizing hints that the Abyssinian, as both a meeting place and the arbiter of the black Portland's moral, religious, and political compass, may have been at the center of the local Underground Railroad activities. Further study of the property may yet reveal this important dimension of its history.

As previously noted, the only direct mention of aiding runaway slaves at the Abyssinian Meeting House itself is in the memoir of a descendant of Amos Freedman.⁶⁹ The nomination form also notes the poor condition of the Abyssinian Meeting House and the potential it holds for further preservation efforts and archeological work by stating, "while much of the Meeting House's period fabric has been lost, (or in some cases, reused) there is still considerable potential that archeological testing under the foundation will yield cultural artifacts pertinent to the understanding of the community."⁷⁰ For these reasons, the Abyssinian Meeting House was nominated primarily under Criterion D, with Criterion A also applicable, to the National Register of Historic Places.⁷¹

Unlike the National Historic Landmark nominations following the Underground Railroad Special Resource Study, designation in this case was not chiefly due to Underground Railroad activities at the site, although it is a portion of the nomination, but rather because it

⁶⁸ Mitchell, Abyssinian Meeting House. United States Department of the Interior National Registration Form, 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁷¹ Ibid., 9.

was a “religious, educational, and cultural center for Portland’s nineteenth century African American population.” After submitting the application on August 29, 2005, the National Park Service officially recognized the Abyssinian Meeting House on February 3, 2006.⁷²

With the focus on raising funds for preservation of the structure and its ultimate use as a cultural center and museum in Portland, the various partners concentrated their attention on fundraising efforts for a restoration plan. The *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* was seen as one of the possible funders for this endeavor. By the time of their application to the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, the partners had raised funds from the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the City of Portland, Portland West, Bank of America, the Village at Ocean Gate and multiple private donors.⁷³ The *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*’s grant opportunities and recognition would continue to aid the restoration of the site for the Committee’s goals. Their application states that because several abolitionists were members of their congregation, the Abyssinian Meeting House has a direct connection with the Underground Railroad. After applying on July 12, 2007, the Abyssinian Meeting House became the first member of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* in Maine. As stated in Maine’s Bangor Daily News “Restoration committee leaders hope its inclusion on the Network to Freedom will attract visitors to Portland who are interested in the Underground Railroad and encourage contributions for the restoration.”⁷⁴

⁷² Committee to Restore the Abyssinian, accessed April 20, 2014, <http://abyme.org/>.

⁷³ Committee to Restore the Abyssinian, *The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom - Abyssinian Meeting House Application*.

⁷⁴ "Site Named First in Maine's Freedom Trail," *Maine's Bangor Daily News*. October 31, 2007.

Since the addition to the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, the Network's funding has become a part of their restoration funding pool. In 2008, the Committee to Restore the Abyssinian was awarded \$50,000:

The grant will replace the missing or damaged hand-hewn roof trusses and purlins in the original roofline. It will remove 20th century dormers that were added when the meeting house was converted to tenements as well as draw in and stabilize the side walls of the building which are bowed out due to lack of support. It will also assist with removing the second and third floor plates that were inserted in the 20th century and restore the volume of the original auditorium (which was the sanctuary), and install new roof decking and roof covering to protect the meeting house from weather-related damage.⁷⁵

Along with this \$50,000 grant, the Committee looked to other several other funding sources, with the total budget at \$205,715 in the 2008-2009 restoration phase.⁷⁶ Even with the enormous efforts of the Committee to Restore the Abyssinian, its partners, and the help of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, the Abyssinian Meeting House was listed on the 2013 National Trust for Historic Preservation's Most Endangered Annual List because of lack of funding.⁷⁷ This lack of funding refers to the one million dollars still needed by the Committee to complete the restoration of the Abyssinian.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ "2008 Network to Freedom Grants," National Park Service, May 25, 2011, accessed April 20, 2014, http://www.nps.gov/subjects/ugrr/about_ntf/grants_2008.htm.

⁷⁶ Agricola Corporation. *Abyssinian Meeting House Capital Budget - December 2009*. <http://www.agricolacorporation.com/AbyssinianCap100630.pdf>

⁷⁷ "11 Most Endangered Historic Places 2013," National Trust for Historic Preservation, accessed March 21, 2014, <http://www.preservationnation.org/issues/11-most-endangered/locations/abyssinian-meeting-house.html>.

⁷⁸ Dennis Hoey, "Portland Landmark Put on Endangered List | The Portland Press Herald / Maine Sunday Telegram," Portland Press Herald, June 19, 2013, accessed April 20, 2014, http://www.pressherald.com/news/landmark-put-on-endangered-list_2013-06-19.html.



Figure 1: Pictured in 2013 with the façade restored, The Abyssinian Meeting House was listed on the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s annual “Most Endangered List” because of lack of funding to restore the rest of the structure (visible on the side.)

Source: 1772 Foundation Website

The Network to Freedom responded to this need, as they approved another grant for restoration efforts on March 24, 2014. The *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* will provide \$10,000 of a matching grant totaling \$25,000 to be used for “structural sill replacement.”⁷⁹

⁷⁹ FY 2014 Network to Freedom Grants Awarded, http://www.nps.gov/subjects/ugrr/about_ntf/upload/FY-2014-Network-to-Freedom-Grants-Awarded.pdf

CASE STUDY TWO: MAYHEW CABIN

Epitomizing the issues of documentation and lore in Underground Railroad commemoration, the historic site of Mayhew Cabin and “John Brown’s Cave” in Nebraska City, Nebraska gained renewed attention during the completion of the Underground Railroad Special Resource Study.⁸⁰ Mentioned in the Advisory Committee’s final report as a site already preserved for its Underground Railroad associations and “the westernmost station on the Underground Railroad in the 1850s. An underground passage connects caves to cabins,” the site’s historical validity remained unexamined until roughly 60 years after opening to the public as a tourist attraction in 1938.⁸¹ Following the legislation, scrutiny of the site’s documentation and reliance on legend exposed quite a different history of the Mayhew Cabin and “John Brown’s Cave.”

Mayhew Cabin’s associations with the Underground Railroad begin with John Kagi, a passionate abolitionist who ultimately would die for the anti-slavery cause during the raid on Harper’s Ferry in Virginia. In 1855, Kagi had left Virginia to live with his sister, Barbara Mayhew, and her family in Nebraska City, who had recently settled there from Ohio. Barbara and Allen Mayhew built the small cabin and began raising their children, with Kagi moving to Kansas by the following summer.⁸² Eventually, Kagi became close with John Brown, a connection that eventually led to the publication of a sensational article in the

⁸⁰ James E. Potter, "Fact and Folklore in the Story of 'John Brown's Cave' and the Underground Railroad in Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 83 (2002): 73.

⁸¹ Underground Railroad Special Resource Study, 24.

⁸² United States of America, National Park Service, *Mayhew Cabin - National Register of Historic Places*, 10-11.

Chicago Times, republished locally, by Dr. John Blue, about the Mayhew's property.⁸³ Blue visited the site, which Barbara sold in 1864 after Allen died, and wrote the piece that became the groundwork for the subsequent folklore. His November 14, 1874 article shared with its readers a description of a cave with two "cross wings" that was accessible by a trapped door in the floor of the Mayhew's cabin. Fugitive slaves could hide and escape to Iowa with the help of the "The Vegetarian Society," the code name for the abolitionists involved. Blue called this space "John Brown's Cave," alleging that Brown guided runaways three or four times from the space to free territory.⁸⁴

In 2002, James Potter, of the Nebraska State Historical Society, discredited much of the myth that had surrounded the site and its connection with John Brown. He hypothesizes that Blue was motivated by the publicity an abolitionist reunion had received in Chicago months before he wrote his article. After another article with a similar description of the cave as Blue's was published in the *Omaha Bee* and locally republished March 20, 1890, Barbara and Allen's son, Edward M. Mayhew, responded with his own explanation of the cave.⁸⁵ As Potter explains in his article "Fact and Folklore in the Story of 'John Brown's Cave' and the Underground Railroad in Nebraska:"

Writing from his home in Kansas, the forty-year-old Mayhew provided a very different version of the cave's history. Mayhew contradicted the Bee's description of the cave's size and its distance from the cabin. He stated that there was no passageway or tunnel connecting the cave with the house, The main entrance to the

⁸³ John Brown was an ardent abolitionist who believed in using violence to end slavery; known for his role in the historical events of "Bleeding Kansas" and for leading a raid on an arsenal in Harper's Ferry, Virginia in order to arm fugitive slaves.

⁸⁴ James E. Potter, "Fact and Folklore in the Story of 'John Brown's Cave' and the Underground Railroad in Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 83 (2002): 74-75.

⁸⁵ Potter, "Fact and Folklore," *Nebraska History* 83 (2002): 75-76.

cave was a large door in plain sight, with a secondary entrance having a ladder leading down into the back of the cave, The cave, according to Mayhew, was dug for storing potatoes and later was enlarged as a wine cellar. "There never was a negro in said cave while Mayhew owned it, neither was John Brown ever in the cave or on the place." Mayhew recalled that his uncle, John Henry Kagi, once brought fourteen blacks to the house for breakfast; after eating they continued north on foot. "There were negroes in the house; John Kagi [sic] was there and was killed at Harper's Ferry; Mayhew lived there and had a cave or wine cellar, and that is all there is in this great mystery."⁸⁶

Potter explains that sources back up the testimony of Mayhew, yet the legend of "John Brown's Cave" perpetuated and led to Henry H. Bartling purchasing the property in 1901 to develop into a tourist attraction. Henry's son, Edward, inherited the site upon his death three years later and continued forward with his father's vision, despite the cave collapsing.⁸⁷

On December 31, 1909, the local newspaper, *The Nebraska City News* published another article detailing the Underground Railroad activity on the Mayhew's former land. Different from previous accounts, Carsten N. Karstens, at the age of seventy-seven, claimed he aided fugitive slaves hiding in "John Brown's Cave." In 1925, Calvin Chapman, who resided in Nebraska City during the supposed Underground Railroad activity, also shared a similar tale. Further affirming the myth of the "John Brown's Cave," Ned. C. Abbott, a Nebraska City public figure, published a 1929 article in *Omaha World Herald* avowing the legend of the cave and evidence of its existence.⁸⁸ Following his 1890 letter, Edward Mayhew, interestingly enough, wrote to Abbott in 1925 about what occurred after the fourteen Black men came with Kagi to Mayhew Cabin:

It was at this time that the officers and some men from Missouri came to the house

⁸⁶ Ibid., 76.

⁸⁷ *Mayhew Cabin - National Register of Historic Places*, 16.

⁸⁸ Potter, "Fact and Folklore," *Nebraska History* 83 (2002): 76-77.

after him. Although my father told them he was upstairs they were afraid to go after him, knowing he was armed. They took his horse and it was said they sold it and divided the money among themselves. My father told them not to bring any more negroes there, as it was only making trouble for him ...⁸⁹

The Underground Railroad connection with the Mayhew Cabin did not dissipate, only growing stronger into the twentieth century.

The continuous interest built the momentum for Edward Bartling's tourist attraction, and with the construction of Nebraska Highway 2, the accessibility of the site expanded to a broader audience. After the Mayhew's left in 1864, the cabin continued to be used as a residence and small changes were made. The back window was replaced with a door, the interior was plastered, and wood siding was placed on the exterior walls. A porch was added to the façade and an addition was added to the rear. (Additions were later added back in the 1960s and then removed again.) In 1937, in order for Bartling to preserve the cabin as a tourist destination, the cabin was moved 50 feet north from its initial location to avoid the path of the new highway; simultaneously, he removed the additions and wood siding. Perhaps the most important component of his entire endeavor, Bartling made the decision to build an entirely new "John Brown's Cave." His construction consisted of a cellar beneath the cabin with a short tunnel leading to the cave, with the two "cross wings" configuration as witnesses described, and then a longer tunnel exiting at a ravine (likely added in the 1950s).⁹⁰

"John Brown's Cave" was a tourism success, bringing money to Nebraska City and Bartling.

⁸⁹ *Mayhew Cabin - National Register of Historic Places*, 13.

⁹⁰ *Mayhew Cabin - National Register of Historic Places*, 5-7.

The driven owner developed a brochure, which further blurred the lines between legend and fact for visitors, notified newspapers of events, and printed postcards. The city embraced his venture, applying for Federal Emergency Recovery Aid (FERA) in 1935 to excavate the original cave, hoping to bring in more tourists. This plan never came to fruition, as the Department of Roads and Bartling instead settled on a deal in 1937. In 1939, Nebraska's Federal Writers Project wrote a guide to Nebraska featuring "John Brown's Cave." The published description gave no indication of the site's inauthenticity, but instead marketed "John Brown's Cave" as a "historical shrine." Bartling continued to see an even larger vision for the site and its profitability, with the possibility for restoration of the cabin, the addition of structures, and paving of a parking lot.⁹¹

After Bartling died in 1948, his estate sold the site to the Rowe family in 1959. The Rowe's continued with Bartling's dream, just as Bartling had done with his father, and added dramatically to the site "approximately 40 "historic" buildings, objects and sites in addition to the Mayhew Cabin on 35 acres of scenic woodland."⁹² In 2001, the owner, Larry Shepard, donated the property to the nonprofit Mayhew Cabin Foundation (Rather than "John Brown's Cave" Foundation) after its formation. This transfer of ownership from private to public hands allowed for a new focus on historical accuracy and education at the site of the Mayhew Cabin.⁹³

⁹¹ *Mayhew Cabin - National Register of Historic Places*, 17-19.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 17-19.

⁹³ Bill Hayes, "Interview with Volunteer Director of Mayhew Cabin Foundation," telephone interview by author, April 25, 2014.

Following the passing of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* legislation in 1998, the new nonprofit applied to be a member. Unable to gain listing on the National Register of Historic Places after multiple attempts, the nonprofit aimed to be recognized by the new program. Following an unsuccessful application in 2001 to the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, the organization improved their documentation and applied again in 2003. The Mayhew Cabin was accepted, without including “John Brown’s Cave,” as the program’s first listing in Nebraska.⁹⁴ In 2005, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* awarded the Mayhew Cabin Foundation a \$21,275 matching grant for restoration of the cabin.⁹⁵ The grant provided funds for the restoration of the interior of the cabin, its walls, and its porch, and with the combination of other funding, the cabin:

included a new cedar shingled roof and new daubing in between the log walls. In addition, the false bead board floor of the loft area was replaced with sawmill cottonwood and repositioned at its 1855 height using the original notches. Any visible electrical additions were removed and modern lighting was replaced with reproduction lanterns and hidden wiring, two lanterns in the loft area and two lanterns on the main level. Allen Mayhew's 1857 Pre-Emption claim served as the main basis for the restoration of the cabin in 2005 and helped the organization achieve very accurate results.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Hayes, "Interview with Volunteer Director," telephone interview by author, April 25, 2014.

⁹⁵ United States. National Park Service, "2005 Network to Freedom Grants," National Park Service, June 03, 2011, accessed April 23, 2014, http://www.nps.gov/subjects/ugrr/about_ntf/grants_2005.htm.

⁹⁶ *Mayhew Cabin - National Register of Historic Places*, 6.



Figure 2: Mayhew Cabin restored to its 1855 period of significance.

Source: Photograph taken by Jessie Nun, of the Nebraska State Historical Society, on September 10, 2010 for the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form

The Foundation refocused the attention back on the Mayhew family and their role with the Underground Railroad. With the site's close proximity to the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, Nebraska, the Foundation has benefited from insight and review of interpretive text panels and their layout, as well as their orientation video. In an interview, Volunteer Director Bill Hayes explained that the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* assisted them in receiving funds from the National Park Foundation's African-American Experience Fund for interpretation, as well as help with fundraising and marketing of the site. When Hayes took over the National Register of Historic Places nomination, an activity going on for several years because of continued denials to the register, he received assistance from the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*. He states, "Being part of the Network to

Freedom has been an asset.”⁹⁷

In 2011, Mayhew Cabin, including “John Brown’s Cave,” was finally approved for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Hayes worked with a person at the state level to redo the narrative and complete the form, nominating the site for both its history with the Underground Railroad and its folklore.⁹⁸ As Potter emphasized at the end of his essay, the history of Mayhew Cabin has a dual nature. First, it does have a connection with the Underground Railroad, albeit one that is unlikely to involve John Brown. Second, the site shows Nebraskans’ desire to incorporate anti-slavery action into their heritage.⁹⁹

From March 11 to 12 of 2011, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* sponsored a Nebraska Network to Freedom Conference, focusing on Nebraska’s role in Underground Railroad.¹⁰⁰ On July 26, 2011, Hayes resigned as the paid Director of the Mayhew Cabin Foundation and became a Volunteer Director, as the Foundation is no longer able to afford a full-time staff position.¹⁰¹ Following the Conference, in 2012, three more sites in Nebraska were added to the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, the Nuckolls Residence, the Majors Residence, and Camp Creek Cemetery, and are partnered with the Mayhew Cabin Foundation to form a driving tour in Nebraska City.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Hayes, "Interview with Volunteer Director," telephone interview by author, April 25, 2014.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Potter, "Fact and Folklore," *Nebraska History* 83 (2002): 86.

¹⁰⁰ *Nebraska Network to Freedom Conference* (Omaha: National Park Service, 2011).

¹⁰¹ United States. National Park Service, "News Details: Mayhew Cabin Faces New Challenges," National Park Service, December 21, 2011, accessed April 23, 2014,

http://www.nps.gov/subjects/ugrr/community/news_details.htm?NEWSID=30079.

¹⁰² *A Network to Freedom: Nebraska’s UGRR Trail* (Omaha: National Park Service, 2012).

CASE STUDY THREE: FORKS OF THE ROAD

Famous for its numerous antebellum mansions, Natchez, Mississippi has been a tourist destination for decades. Within its boundaries are forty antebellum mansions that remain because of Natchez's early surrender in the Civil War, causing tourists to flock to the city looking for the romanticized Old South. A major economic force for Natchez, heritage tourism developed around the demands of its white visitors and omitted the evils of chattel slavery from the city's attractions.¹⁰³ These depictions of white plantations and their characterization of African Americans are explicated in a 1935 publication:

Perhaps a grizzled, bent, old ex-slave stands to bow you in, or a strapping, courteous young Negro will direct the parking of your car. At another place as you step up onto the gallery, a little colored boy stoops and wipes your shoes. . . . Awaiting inside to receive you with gracious courtesy, stands the hostess with a group of her friends.¹⁰⁴

Decades later, as the Civil Rights Movement challenged the American South's racist Jim Crow laws and treatment of African Americans, these historic sites were seen as another obstacle. In 1964, the NAACP and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee reacted to these demeaning depictions but were unable to achieve any momentous changes because of the private ownership of the properties.¹⁰⁵

As noted by historian Steven Hoelscher, "if anything, heritage tourism based on a spurious vision of the Old South has only increased during the past forty years," but these challenges to the heritage tourism industry "did effect the removal of objectionable scenes from the pageant and museum-home tours that many found so offensive." Within recent years,

¹⁰³ Hoelscher, "The White-Pillared Past," in *Landscape and Race in the United States*, ed. Richard H. Schein (New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ Hoelscher, "The White-Pillared Past," in *Landscape and Race in the United States*, 54.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

African Americans in Natchez are aiming to revise the prevailing and commoditized version of the South into a balanced vision.¹⁰⁶ One of these Black Natchezians was Ser Seshs Ab Heter-Clifford M. Boxley, who left Natchez in 1965 to join Black social movements in California. Upon returning in 1995, Boxley saw the site of the former slave market “Forks of the Road” as a place of significant importance that must be preserved.¹⁰⁷

Appearing on maps beginning in 1808, Forks of the Road was located at the intersection of Liberty and Washington Roads, today D’Evereux Drive and Liberty Road. Fearing a cholera outbreak, an 1833 city ordinance prohibited slaves from being housed in Natchez and the location proved to be ideal for slave traders, as it was then on the edge of the city. Ultimately becoming the second largest slave market in the nineteenth century south, the market’s activity grew after Issac Franklin and John Armfield began to operate at the location in 1833. The two partners became the dominant slave traders in the United States, using the Forks of the Road as a place to transport and sell slaves. At the site, holding pens and barracks would have been visible, with 500 enslaved people on the property at its busiest. According to historians Jim Barnett and H. Clark Burkett, “A distinctive characteristic of the Forks of the Road slave market was the manner in which sales were transacted.” Slaves were not sold at an auction, but rather on an individual basis, allowing buyers to bargain and purchase slaves without a pre-determined schedule. The market continued to remain active until the Civil War, when Natchez capitulated to Union forces in 1863. Following Union control and the Emancipation Proclamation, the site was likely used temporarily by

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 55.

¹⁰⁷ Ser Seshs Ab Heter-Clifford M. Boxley, "Interview with Coordinator of Friends of the Forks of the Roads Society Inc," telephone interview by author, April 20, 2014.

freedmen who joined an encampment of Black Union soldiers that had settled near the Forks of the Road. Following the end of the Civil War, the structures at the Forks of the Road were demolished, the street names were changed, and new structures were built. Three antebellum mansions named D'Evereux, Linden, and Monmouth, once in visible proximity to the Forks on the Road, remained for the future tourists, but the market had been eradicated.¹⁰⁸

From 1995 to 2000, after Boxley returned to Natchez, he advocated for the site's inclusion in the Natchez National Historical Park and recognition by the National Park Service, because he believed the agency had failed in telling the whole story of Natchez. During those years, Boxley held annual commemorations at the site, and in 2000 founded the Friends-of-the-Forks-of-the-Roads Society, Inc.¹⁰⁹ In June of 1998, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History erected a state historic marker, the first marker to recognize the importance of the site at its location, with funds provided by the Natchez Juneteenth Committee. In 1999, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History nominated the former site of Forks of the Road for National Historic Landmark status.¹¹⁰ It was an unsuccessful nomination because two of the landowners (the site had been split into thirds following the demolition of the slave market) objected to National Landmark designation. Furthermore, as historian Steven Hoelscher states,

Very little remains of the antebellum landscape. In historic preservation terms, the

¹⁰⁸ "The Forks of the Road Slave Market At Natchez," Mississippi History Now, accessed May 05, 2014, <http://mshistory.k12.ms.us/articles/47/the-forks-of-the-road-slave-market-at-natchez>.

¹⁰⁹ Boxley, "Interview with Coordinator of Friends of the Forks of the Roads Society Inc," April 20, 2014.

¹¹⁰ Ser Seshs Ab Heter-Clifford M. Boxley. *The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom - Forks of the Road Enslavement Market Terminus Application*. PDF. National Park Service.

site has been “massively disturbed,” making it extremely difficult to place the property on the National Register of Historic Places, much less achieve National Historic Landmark status. This is not an inconsequential dilemma, because Landmark status would go a long way toward integrating the site into the Natchez National Historical Park and to creating a center for the study of the interstate slave trade—the ultimate objective for those most involved.¹¹¹

Without any visible integrity of the Forks of the Road in existence, the site was an unlikely candidate for any National Park Service recognition, that is, until the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*.

Around 2000/2001, Boxley explained that he visited Washington D.C. in hopes of speaking with the head of the National Park Service about including the Forks of the Road within the Natchez National Historic Park. Boxley was then referred to the new legislation of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* and was put in contact with its then Southeast Coordinator, National Park Service Historian Barbara Tagger. After discussing the Forks of the Road situation with Tagger, he was told that if he could connect the site with the Underground Railroad, the site would be eligible for inclusion in the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*. Boxley uncovered an 1859 advertisement for a fugitive slave escaping from the Forks of the Road. After Tagger visited the site in Natchez, Boxley successfully submitted an application for the Forks of the Road Enslavement Market Terminus to *the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* in 2001. The application consisted of the public street juncture, as the three parcels were still privately owned at the time of the application. The application was signed off by the City of Natchez and became part of one of the first rounds of approved members to the *National Underground Railroad*

¹¹¹ Hoelscher, "The White-Pillared Past," in *Landscape and Race in the United States*, 59.

*Network to Freedom.*¹¹²

The same year that the Forks of the Road Enslavement Market Terminus was added to the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, the Mississippi Department of Archives and History received \$200,000 in funding to purchase one third of the site. Boxley stated that the intention was for it to eventually become part of the Natchez National Historical Park. In the following years, Barbara Tagger helped Boxley receive a number of grants to educate the public about the Forks of the Road and the Underground Railroad, while advocating for the site's preservation. In 2001, Boxley received a Lower Mississippi Delta Grant for \$25,000, aided by Tagger, to develop a traveling exhibit titled, "African/European Roots of the Underground Railroad (story of freedom struggles from Africa to Forks of the Road)" and now on display in New York and Ohio. In 2002, Boxley received a \$7,500 matching grant from the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* for "a 740-plus page research study into the Mississippi River as a route of escape and documented Underground Railroad stories from the Old Southwest (Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, and Tennessee)." The research study remains unpublished, but Boxley explains that it provides evidence that not all Underground Railroad activity meant heading to north and as well as discredits the myth that "once you were sold down the river there would be no escape."¹¹³ Following this study, in 2008, Boxley received another grant from the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* for 10,000 copies of a Forks of the Road interpretive brochure, which Boxley said was used to "draw people to Forks of the Road" and provide a "higher

¹¹² Boxley, "Interview with Coordinator of Friends of the Forks of the Roads Society Inc," April 20, 2014.

¹¹³ Ibid.

communication of its history.” There are now 1,000 copies remaining.¹¹⁴



Figure 3: Pictured in 2013, the city-owned parcel of the Forks of the Road site features no original structure but does contain interpretive texts and a historical site marker featuring the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* logo.

Source: “On the Road with Jim and Mary,” Wordpress Blog, otrwtjam.wordpress.com

Since the approval of membership of the Forks of the Road Enslavement Market Terminus to the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*, the site has received the attention needed for its advocacy efforts but still faces obstacles. As Boxley asserted, “the Network to Freedom was responsible for the first national and international recognition of the Forks of the Road, the Network to Freedom launched the first national publicity and notoriety about the Forks of the Road. It was the originator, it allowed me to go national for the first

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

time.”¹¹⁵ Today, as only one of the three sections of the original site is publicly owned, the other two are at risk for development. One of the parcels currently has 26 new housing units on the site and the Natchez city planning commission has approved more. In 2013, the National Park Service completed a study to decide if the Natchez National Historical Park should expand to include the Forks of the Road and preserve the remaining land.¹¹⁶ As of right now, as Boxley puts it, “All we need is the legislation.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ "Rezoning for Housing at Forks Approved," NewsDaily, October 16, 2013, accessed May 05, 2014, <http://www.newsdaily.com/us-politics/84c1d18ae864549a7082c2d16a74386a/rezoning-for-housing-at-forks-approved>.

¹¹⁷ Boxley, "Interview with Coordinator of Friends of the Forks of the Roads Society Inc," April 20, 2014

CONCLUSION

Almost sixteen years after the passing of the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* Act, the program has reviewed 27 rounds of applications and approved 529 new members consisting of sites, programs, and facilities. The *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* continues to be managed by program coordinator Diane Miller, providing grants, technical assistance, interpretation guidance, and recognition for the members of the program.¹¹⁸ The Underground Railroad sites of the Abyssinian Meeting House, Mayhew Cabin, and Forks of the Road, reflect the varied nature of those admitted to the program. With the ideals of commemorating, representing, and preserving the non-uniform and secretive history of the Underground Railroad across the broad landscape of the United States, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* has succeeded by allowing sites to achieve greater recognition and approval by the National Park Service through restoration and documentation assistance.

Still requiring a documented connection with the Underground Railroad, albeit an application process that is less restricting than the National Register of Historic Places criterion, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* is able to weed out those sites that are unlikely to prosper or provide beneficial interpretation. With the cases of the Abyssinian Meeting House, Mayhew Cabin, and Forks of the Road, strong advocates saw the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* as a stepping-stone to greater recognition in the future. As Miller shared,

¹¹⁸ Miller, "Interview with National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Coordinator," telephone interview by author, April 11, 2014.

A lot of people who try to preserve this history are laboring in the wilderness, they are regarded a little bit in their communities as the fringe element... when they get the validation of being accepted into the Network, their local communities begin to take them more seriously and it has helped some places to really sort of turn the corner.

As with the Abyssinian Meeting House, the Committee to Restore the Abyssinian was able to gain further recognition for their site with membership to the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*. A site already listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the membership directly associated the structure with the activity of the Underground Railroad. Mayhew Cabin was also able to amend the issues created by a false representation of Underground Railroad activity at their site. By using their membership in the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* program, the Mayhew Cabin Foundation was able to revalidate its association with the Underground Railroad and receive greater support from the scholars and the Nebraska City community. Lastly, the Forks of the Road's support from their membership in the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* program propelled it to become a focal point for the city of Natchez and Natchez National Historical Park. The future of the site, although with a portion of it being developed, is substantially more positive because of its alliance with the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom*.

In conclusion, the three cases of Abyssinian Meeting House, Mayhew Cabin, and Forks of the Road show the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* provides sites with a better chance of being listed on the National Register of Historic Places or through a National Park Service Unit. Using the resources provided through the program, these three sites either improved their documentation and/or preservation. The *National Underground*

Railroad Network to Freedom program affords the opportunity for a site to become eligible for Section 106, and therefore offers it a greater chance at survival. Therefore, the *National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom* program is a model for sites with documentation and preservation issues to become more integrated into their local preservation network, or even into National Park Service units, for sustained preservation.

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APPENDIX A: PUBLIC LAW 105–203

105th Congress
July 21, 1998

An Act

To establish within the United States National Park Service the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act of 1998”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.

(a) FINDINGS.—The Congress finds the following:

- (1) The Underground Railroad, which flourished from the end of the 18th century to the end of the Civil War, was one of the most significant expressions of the American civil rights movement during its evolution over more than three centuries.
- (2) The Underground Railroad bridged the divides of race, religion, sectional differences, and nationality; spanned State lines and international borders; and joined the American ideals of liberty and freedom expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to the extraordinary actions of ordinary men and women working in common purpose to free a people.
- (3) Pursuant to title VI of Public Law 101–628 (16 U.S.C. 1a–5 note; 104 Stat. 4495), the Underground Railroad Advisory Committee conducted a study of the appropriate means of establishing an enduring national commemorative Underground Railroad program of education, example, reflection, and reconciliation.
- (4) The Underground Railroad Advisory Committee found that—
 - (A) although a few elements of the Underground Railroad story are represented in existing National Park Service units and other sites, many sites are in imminent danger of being lost or destroyed, and many important resource types are not adequately represented and protected;
 - (B) there are many important sites which have high potential for preservation and visitor use in 29 States, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands;
 - (C) no single site or route completely reflects and characterizes the Underground Railroad, since its story and associated resources involve networks and regions of the country rather than individual sites and trails; and
 - (D) establishment of a variety of partnerships between the Federal Government and other levels of government and the private sector would be

most appropriate for the protection and interpretation of the Underground Railroad.

(5) The National Park Service can play a vital role in facilitating the national commemoration of the Underground Railroad.

(6) The story and significance of the Underground Railroad can best engage the American people through a national program of the National Park Service that links historic buildings, structures, and sites; routes, geographic areas, and corridors; interpretive centers, museums, and institutions; and programs, activities, community projects, exhibits, and multimedia materials, in a manner that is both unified and flexible.

(b) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this Act are the following:

(1) To recognize the importance of the Underground Railroad, the sacrifices made by those who used the Underground Railroad in search of freedom from tyranny and oppression, and the sacrifices made by the people who helped them.

(2) To authorize the National Park Service to coordinate and facilitate Federal and non-Federal activities to commemorate, honor, and interpret the history of the Underground Railroad, its significance as a crucial element in the evolution of the national civil rights movement, and its relevance in fostering the spirit of racial harmony and national reconciliation.

SEC. 3. NATIONAL UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NETWORK TO FREEDOM PROGRAM.

(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of the Interior (in this Act referred to as the “Secretary”) shall establish in the National Park Service a program to be known as the “National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom” (in this Act referred to as the “national network”). Under the program, the Secretary shall—

(1) produce and disseminate appropriate educational materials, such as handbooks, maps, interpretive guides, or electronic information;

(2) enter into appropriate cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding to provide technical assistance under subsection (c); and

(3) create and adopt an official, uniform symbol or device for the national network and issue regulations for its use.

(b) ELEMENTS.—The national network shall encompass the following elements:

(1) All units and programs of the National Park Service determined by the Secretary to pertain to the Underground Railroad.

(2) Other Federal, State, local, and privately owned properties pertaining to the Underground Railroad that have a verifiable connection to the Underground Railroad and that are included on, or determined by the Secretary to be eligible for inclusion on, the National Register of Historic Places.

(3) Other governmental and nongovernmental facilities and programs of an educational, research, or interpretive nature that are directly related to the Underground Railroad.

(c) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS AND MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING.—

To achieve the purposes of this Act and to ensure effective coordination of the Federal and non-Federal elements of the national network referred to in subsection (b) with National Park Service units and programs, the Secretary may enter into cooperative agreements and memoranda of understanding with, and provide technical assistance to—

(1) the heads of other Federal agencies, States, localities, regional governmental bodies, and private entities; and

(2) in cooperation with the Secretary of State, the governments of Canada, Mexico, and any appropriate country in the Caribbean.

(d) APPROPRIATIONS.—There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act not more than \$500,000 for each fiscal year. No amounts may be appropriated for the purposes of this Act except to the Secretary for carrying out the responsibilities of the Secretary as set forth in section 3(a).

Approved July 21, 1998.

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