

NPS Aids Pathways to Freedom Group

It wasn't quite 7:00 am on July 29, 1997 in Washington, DC, when the group of sojourners crossed the line between North Carolina and Virginia. We and others like them were waiting to receive them at some point during their stay. The accident occurred around 7:30 am on the same day. I had embraced the chance to meet the group upon their arrival in Washington. I had been invited to discuss the local history of the underground railroad and the National UGRR Network to Freedom Initiative in which the National Park Service (NPS) and I had been intricately involved over the past several years.

The sojourners were Pathways to Freedom students involved in the national summer program of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development. My exposure to this program was to become one of the most moving experiences of my work with the NPS and the UGRR Initiative. Most of the youth were from across the nation. Two students, Makia Gibson and Deon Thurston were from the Bahamas, a location rarely mentioned in the context of areas into which people sought freedom. The group's members came together without prior introduction to join in an educational and historical research program which would take the history lesson from the traditional classroom setting and retrace the sites and routes of the UGRR, the civil rights movement, and explore other valuable subjects.

Five adult chaperons guided the participants, aged 11 to 17, on their journey. They were en route to the Capitol to join other youth to express to the Members of Congress their views and support for pending legislation calling for the establishment of the National UGRR Network to Freedom Program within the NPS. The legislation would further the NPS's efforts to preserve, commemorate and interpret the UGRR sites and routes across the United States, Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean. Subcommittee hearings on H.R. 1635 had been held the week before with strong support from around the nation.

The students were to stay at Howard University and be hosted by several local institutions including Georgetown University and the Mt. Zion United Methodist Church both in Georgetown, once a thriving area for UGRR activity. They would tour selected sites significant to African-American history in general and UGRR history in particular.

Addie Richburg and I had met months earlier and we had since shared extensive dialogue about the program. This provided an excellent opportunity to further the 1990 Congressionally authorized study of the UGRR by educating youth, the only true way in which the NPS would succeed in its efforts. A U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons Headquarters employee by day, Richburg was also co-owner in a North Carolina partnership which served as program development consultants for the Institute, and began her night shift for the Pathways program. It was imperative that the NPS and those involved in the initiative realize the value of youth and their role in carrying forth the message and potential of self-empowerment. It was that assertiveness and strength which carved the loose and secretive networks we have grown to know as the underground railroad movement. While we were far from making a formal partnership between government and other organizations through the initiative, Richburg and I discussed history, resources, and dual partnerships between the NPS UGRR Initiative, Pathways to Freedom Program, and the Federal Bureau of Prisons (perhaps as constructively as the UGRR conductors and stationmasters did in the 1800s). We examined our mutual goals and concurred that we would plan and execute actions supportive of our respective programs.

For more information on the NPS Underground Railroad National and International Initiative, contact: Underground Railroad Initiative, National Park Service, National Capital Region, 1100 Ohio Drive, SW, Washington, DC 20242; Telephone: 202-619-7077. The text of the House and Senate versions of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Act of 1997 [H.R. 1635 and S887, respectively] are available on the Internet at <<http://www.congress.gov>>.

The Pathways to Freedom Program is open to all youth aged 11 to 17. It provides historical research journeys to U.S. and international sites significant to the underground railroad and civil rights history, and focuses on self-development skills. For more information, contact: The Bell Richburg Group, Program and Management Consultants, P.O. Box 10476, Goldsboro, NC 27532; tel: 919-778-4831.

In revisiting the morning of the accident in my mind, I remember watching flashing TV news reports which showed a chartered bus lying on its side in a river south of Petersburg, VA. The group's journey was cut short by the very element that had befriended and hidden the tracks of an enslaved people. Adisa Foluke, one of the chaperons, died at the scene. Like Harriett Tubman, death had also survived many journeys.

Terry Carlstrom, NPS National Capital Region (NCR) Director, dispatched a four-member team that I led to provide humanitarian support to the victims. After contacting Pathways national coordinator Richburg, who had established a command center in Petersburg, VA, the NPS team left NPS-NCR headquarters at 10:00 pm to aid the victims. Other NPS-NCR team members were: Motor Pool Chief Howard Wilder, Wilder's nephew volunteer Rick Young, and volunteer Peter Hanes.

In summation, there are striking similarities between the experiences of these youth, my work, and the goals of the National Park Service Underground Railroad National and International Initiative. To capture reasons for my work, I look toward a higher vision: the legislation as sponsored by Rep. Stokes and U.S. Sen. Rob Portman

of Ohio; the NPS's involvement in protecting and conserving the nation's cultural and natural resources for its citizens; the pivotal roles of Rosa Parks and others like her in history; the forethought and commitment of Parks and Steele to educate youth; and Adisa Foluke, who gave his life to lead this group. In closing, I refer to the words of accident survivor Christopher St. Clair Lowe of Philadelphia, who dedicated his high school report entitled "What is the Price of Freedom?" to Foluke's memory: "The theme (of Pathways), 'Where have we been? Where are we going?' means that anything you want to become in life, you can become, but you have to know what you've been through and where you've been before you can know where you are going. To get where you are going successfully, you have to know where it all began."

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Tara Morrison

The UGRR Archeology Initiative

The Underground Railroad Archeology Initiative is a direct result of the National Park Service (NPS) Underground Railroad Special Resource Study and the National Park Service National Historic Landmark (NHL) Archeological Initiative. In 1990 Congress enacted Public Law 101-623 which directed the NPS to identify ways to commemorate and interpret the underground railroad. Although many underground railroad related standing structures were identified through this process, there are many related structures which are no longer in existence. The Special Resource Study created an opportunity to combine the NPS efforts initiated by the Special Resource Study to commemorate and interpret the underground railroad with the NHL Archeological Initiative.

The NHL Archeological Initiative serves as a vehicle to increase the number of archeological National Historic Landmarks. The NHL Archeological Initiative has three components: to develop nominations of new archeological sites; to

increase public and professional awareness of archeological NHLs; and to improve documentation about existing archeological NHLs. This Initiative provides the framework for the Underground Railroad Archeological Initiative and supports the ultimate goal of improving public understanding and appreciation of the history of the underground railroad from the perspective of archeological resources and cultural landscapes. In addition, the NHL Underground Railroad Archeological Initiative will result in information that can be used by federal, state and local governments and agencies to protect, preserve, and commemorate archeological properties associated with the underground railroad.

As the Initiative was developed it was determined that the underground railroad has not been a focus for historical archeologists. This conclusion is also based on a presentation to the Society for Historical Archeology (SHA) in January 1997. At that meeting of the SHA Executive Board, a final resolution was passed which endorses the