



The mission of the Kennett Underground Railroad Center is to preserve the heritage and engage the public about the historic abolitionists and freedom-seekers of this area and beyond.

We do so by offering bus and automotive tours, public presentations, published work in a variety of formats, occasional re-enactments of related historic events, and lectures on current UGRR research. We invite you to take advantage of these public events:

- Sign up for our 2018 tours (see schedule on right);
- Request a KURC presenter for your organization;
- Attend a re-enactment or lecture (announcements about these will be on our website and Facebook page. See p. 5 for pictures of past re-enactments.)

In the near future we expect to have a learning center in the Kennett Square area, which people will be able visit on scheduled days.

If our work is of interest to you, you might wish to consider volunteering for our activities. We have a small board of committed members, but we also have a number of volunteers who help in various ways.

In friendship,

John A. O'Neal, President, KURC

Contact information:

- info@kennettundergroundrr.org
- P. O. Box 202, Kennett Square, PA 19348
- 484-544-5070 • Look for us also on Facebook.

Upcoming Events

Please join us on Sunday, March 4, 2018, from 2-4:00 pm, for an Open House at Kennett Friends Meeting, 125 West Sickle St., right off North Union in Kennet Square. We will introduce ourselves as Board members and volunteers and explain what projects we are working on, both as a group and individually. We will make brief presentations on current research, tell a few stories of the local UGRR, and answer any questions. There will be coffee, tea, and light refreshments. If you think you will attend, please contact us by Thursday, March 1.

Scheduled Bus Tours for 2018

These two-hour tours take place on the third Sunday of each month. They begin at 2:30 at Brandywine Valley Tourism on 300 Greenwood Road, outside Longwood Gardens.

May 20	June 17	July 16
Aug. 19	Sept. 23	Oct. 21

For more tour information and to register using Eventbrite, please visit the Events Section on our Facebook page or website. Registration may also be made via email or voice message.

Our tour buses take a maximum of 23 passengers. **Private group tours can also be arranged.**

*This is our first effort at a KURC publication to share with those who, over the years, have expressed interest in our work. We expect it to be a quarterly publication. We hope to keep everyone abreast of our activities, our hopes for the future, and, as our mission states, "to preserve the heritage" of the UGRR in this area. If you have questions, comments, or possible contributions to future issues of **The Lantern**, please contact us.*

Donate to KURC

Many of you receiving this publication have made donations in past years to the Kennett Underground Railroad Center, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. We hope you --and our other readers-- will consider making a donation this year, mailing them to the address on the left. We will be sending out a reminder on Giving Tuesday-- November 28.

The Christiana Resistance of 1851 Commemorated

by Terence Maguire

On Saturday, September 9, 2017, the Christiana Historical Society (CHS) of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, held its third annual commemoration of what is called the “Christiana Resistance,” which occurred 166 years ago on September 11, 1851. Many consider this event to be the opening skirmish of the Civil War. [See accompanying article on the Resistance itself on the following pages]

Michele Sullivan and John O’Neal of the Kennett Underground Railroad Center attended this event last year, and thinking it was a good thing to sustain the connections they established with the Christiana Historical Society, this writer found the little borough



of Christiana and Zercher’s Hotel, (below) home of CHS and site of the commemoration. First

I met and talked with Nancy Plumley, a long-time member of CHS and a good friend of Mary Dugan, the late beloved leader of KURC. Nancy and Mary had done research on the UGRR together, and back in 2009 Plumley had shared with Mary an account of the so-called “Riot,” written by a granddaughter of the UGRR agents Daniel and Hannah Gibbons. We spoke of the possibility of CHS and KURC working on projects together. Nancy then introduced me to Joseph Becton [right], head of the Third Infantry Regiment of the United States Colored Troops (USCT), a set of Civil War re-enactors begun in 1990. We discussed the possibility of future re-enactments with KURC members.



Entering the Masonic Lodge across the street, I saw several dozen listeners, giving rapt attention to Philip Merrill’s explanation of his exhibit “Hidden in the Shadows of Slavery,” a collection of artifacts he has gleaned for his business, Nanny Jack & Co. He showed old photographs of former slaves, such as

James “General” Jackson, who lived to 100 years; and free Blacks, like Thomas Stokes, the 1st Black constable of Williamsport. These photos and snippets of African-American history represent for Merrill starting points for fleshing out individual Black lives and culture in American history.

Nanny Jack & Company, created by Merrill in 1994, is “an archives and consulting agency specializing in creating projects that illuminate the African American experience through memorabilia, oral history and research...[with] over 30,000 artifacts, including photographs, rare books, folk art, documents, music, dolls, furniture, and quilts.” Merrill has also developed educational programs for schools and television. (Quotes taken from the <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/appraisers/philip-merrill/>)

At the end of Merrill’s fascinating presentation, historian Chris Densmore rose to make the point that, as Merrill and Nanny Jack prove, history is unfinished. It is to be found not only in books and libraries but in the search for small details and artifacts that can then be developed into greater understanding of a time, a place, a people, and a set of ideas. (See Densmore’s reprinted article on p. 5)



Inside the Hotel, in the CHS museum, an elegantly dressed woman, Lydia Hamilton Smith (actually, historian Darlene Colon, President of the Christiana Historical Society) discussed details of the Resistance being commemorated. The original Lydia Hamilton Smith was both the

housekeeper and the business partner of Thaddeus Stevens, a Republican leader of the House of Representatives. After Stevens had been elected to Congress, Smith increasingly handled Stevens’s business affairs and became quite an entrepreneur herself. She owned multiple properties and several boarding houses, quite an achievement for any woman, no less an African-American woman of that time.

Colon has pursued history and genealogy since she was quite young, and includes among her ancestors Ezekiel Thompson, one of the 38 persons charged with treason because of the Christiana Resistance. (See next article) Colon’s entire heritage has been linked to the search for justice and freedom. According to Colon, “Lydia H. Smith” has given many presentations in this area. She enjoys talking about her life and the ways that women can overcome barriers set up over the years to hinder their progress.

Events at Christiana: Prelude, Confrontation, and Trial



For much of the perspectives and details included here, the writer is indebted to *Treason at Christiana: September 11, 1851*, written in 2006 by L. D. “Bud” Rettow, late of the Christiana Historical Society. This work is highly recommended and available from CHS. by Terence Maguire

Background. Resistance in Lancaster County--the resistance of former slaves, free Blacks, and abolition-minded whites against those trying to capture fugitive slaves--did not begin on Sept. 11, 1851. Agents of the Underground Railroad, both Black and white, had been assisting runaways for decades.

Those pursuing fugitives often made no distinction between former slaves and freeborn Blacks. A group of white thugs known as the Gap Gang, named for the nearby town of Gap and led by Amos Clemson, spread terror throughout the region on free and fugitive alike, never using the law to support them but breaking down doors at night and capturing anyone whom they pleased. Those taken ended up back with their former masters, on the auction block in Baltimore, or dead.

Matters became worse with the Compromise of 1850, which included the Fugitive Slave Law of September, 1850. It gave slave masters greater latitude in recovering their escaped “property.” Among other features, it required local law enforcement agents to assist slave catchers and owners and also empowered U.S. marshals accompanying owners to deputize local persons. “Should a person refuse to obey the orders of a marshal with the necessary government-issued papers and aid in the capture of a runaway slave, that person was...subject to a fine of \$1000,” (Rettow, p. 7).

This intensification of slave-recovery efforts was countered in Lancaster county by a coalition of free and formerly unfree Blacks under the leadership of

William Parker. Himself a fugitive, Parker was a man of great physical and mental strength and remarkable courage and determination. He lived in a tenant dwelling on the farm of Quaker Levi Pownall, outside the little town of Christiana. In defiance of local white hostility to Blacks, and in particular slave catchers like the Gap Gang, he organized a self-help group of Black agricultural workers whom he imbued with his fierce determination to fight back. On several occasions in the late 1840s and early 1850s, Parker and his friends not only helped fugitives coming from nearby Maryland but also pursued, ambushed, and waylaid slave-catchers, often rescuing those captured and returning them to freedom. Gibbons’s account of the event cites Quaker James Jackson’s reference to having seen the group “‘training’ on a public road,” as if they were a military unit.

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Edward Gorsuch. In our current day it is difficult to consider 19th C. slave-owners as worthy of respect, considering that they were perfectly content to live on the toil of others, their “property,” giving almost nothing in return. That said, in any subset of persons there will be gradations of quality. If so, Edward Gorsuch might be considered among the best of a bad lot. He inherited a number of slaves and a farm in nearby Maryland from his uncle, along with a will stating that his slaves were to be freed after 28 years of service to either him or his nephew. Some had already been freed, and many believed he would honor the rest of that will. “His kindness to his slaves was well known.” (Rettow, p. 26).

Nonetheless, four of those slaves were apparently unwilling to wait for manumission and escaped from his Retreat Farm in November, 1849. Gorsuch received word a year later that the four were on a farm outside Christiana. Gorsuch went through all the legal channels, received proper papers from federal authorities in Philadelphia, acquired the services of a U.S. marshal, Henry Kline, and along with his son and nephew, went to Christiana to recapture them.

Resistance Itself. Once there, in front of Parker’s house, where they were apparently staying, he called out that he would “forgive their transgressions and treat them kindly,” but he intended to regain his “property.” Parker, meanwhile, had received advance warning that Gorsuch, his son, and other whites were coming. He denied any fugitives were in his house. From that house Parker’s wife sounded a “fish horn,” a signal for the resistance group to assemble, and rap-

idly they did so with scythes, knives, corn cutters, and some guns. Accounts of the numbers of those assembled varies from many dozen to 150, but it was clearly a formidable group. Several white farmers, sympathetic with the cause of the fugitives, appeared on the scene, including Castner Hanway, Joseph Scarlett, and Elijah Lewis. Marshal Kline insisted that they join the effort to recapture the fugitives, but they refused. At some point fighting broke out, shots were fired, Marshal Kline fled to nearby woods, Edward Gorsuch's son Dickinson was badly wounded, and Edward himself was killed: a very brief and small skirmish, but with powerful and national repercussions.

(The print below is from William Still's *The Underground Railroad*, 1872, and was not intended to be a precise depiction of what happened.)

Trial. The legal details are too complex for this short essay, but here are some important points.

- Large numbers of law enforcement officers and even U.S. Marines descended on little Christiana village



and arrested dozens of supposed participants.

- 38 persons, including the three above-mentioned whites, were indicted not with murder but rather with *treason*, essentially, making war on the U.S. government or supporting its enemies--for which the punishment was hanging. The prisoners were brought to Moyamensing Prison in Philadelphia for trial.
- The trial received considerable national attention, and the prosecution began by trying Caster Hanway, on the assumption that he was the most obviously guilty. Many assumed that such a resistance had to have been led by a white man. (Obviously the

Dickinson Gorsuch and his family were deeply grateful to the Pownalls and remained close friends even after the Civil War.

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prosecutors knew little of the determination and courage of William Parker.) The defense was led by Thaddeus Stevens, the Representative to Congress from that part of Pennsylvania. Stevens and the other defense lawyers proved beyond doubt that U.S. Marshal Kline was a liar as well as a coward, and having undermined the prosecution's main witness, the case against Hanway fell apart.

- The prosecution, having failed in what they thought was the easiest part of their job, abandoned prosecution of the others, all of whom went free.

Aftermath. Parker, along with three other African-American participants and with the help of prominent Chester County UGRR agents, fled to Canada, where he remained until after the Civil War. Dickinson Gorsuch was taken to the home of Quaker abolitionist Levi Pownall, where he was over many weeks nursed back to health by the Pownall family. Though they were strenuously against the Fugitive Slave Act and slavery, they treated Gorsuch as a human being in need of care and kindness. Dickinson Gorsuch and his family were deeply grateful to the Pownalls and remained close friends even after the Civil War.

If only the example of the Pownalls and the Gorsuch family were the legacy of the Christiana Resistance, but instead the ill-will engendered by this skirmish only intensified sectional animosity and hastened the coming of the Civil War.



On occasion members of KURC and friends re-enact events involving the Underground Railroad in Chester County. Here are glimpses of some of us channeling our inner 19th C. Quaker UGRR agent. Seen here are (L-R) John O’Neal, Terry Maguire, Richard Bernard, (descended from a number of known 19th C. UGRR agents), Michele Sullivan, and former colleague Chris Densmore, whose article appears below.

How Do You Know That? Telling the Underground Railroad Story in Chester County

Chris Densmore, Curator, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College *(originally printed in 2014)*

How do you learn all this history? Many people didn’t particularly like history in school. Most people don’t read the “academic” books and scholarly articles produced by history professors. An “academic” book by an “academic press” may be read by a very limited number of specialists.

But people have a voracious appetite for learning about history. Their sources? Some historical sites like the Liberty Bell Pavilion and Independence Hall in Philadelphia and Gettysburg draw millions of visitors each year. People plan vacations around visiting these sites, and they learn about history from park rangers, historical re-enactors, visitor centers, and roadside markers. Far larger numbers absorb history through movies, television programs, and novels. For children, there is the “American Girl” series. For adults, the choice of reading material on slavery and the Underground Railroad range from Tracy Chevalier’s *The Last Runaway* to the racks of historical novels, westerns, spy novels and romance novels available at the local supermarket. Next time you pass by the display of current romance novel titles, note how many of them have historical themes. Novels they are, but often authors are very interested in total accuracy of the background even if the story line might seem a little heated.

A lot of people seem to think that every historical topic has been covered. Interested in Abraham Lincoln? Just go to the Bayard Taylor Library and read about Lincoln and borrow movies and recorded books about Lincoln. No problem. But the Underground Railroad in Chester County is another matter. Yes, there are books by Robert Smedley, William Kasha-

tus and Frances Taylor, but they only tell parts of the story. Where is the rest? Waiting to be discovered in old newspapers, diaries, and official records by people like the late Mary Dugan and the Kennett Underground Railroad Center. Historical fiction is all very well, but right here in Chester County we have thrilling accounts of people escaping from slavery and people like the Barnards, Darlington, Fussells and others, at great risk, standing up to slave catchers and kidnappers.

And how do we tell these stories? Many of these stories that are just now being rediscovered deserve to be in the history books, but they will reach the most people as stories told through the Underground Railroad Tours of the Kennett Underground Railroad, as part of local festivals, and as talks for the Hadley Foundation. And, after we’ve told of some interesting incident, we can say that this story is so much better than all those novels because our stories are real, about real people, and these people were our neighbors, and then we can point to the Longwood Progressive Friends Meetinghouse, to the Cox House, to the Fussell House and numerous other sites. And, in the sense of local pride, that our area is unique in having so many sites that can be directly and accurately connected to the “Trackless Trail” to freedom.

As an example of Chris Densmore’s point, our colleague Michele Sullivan will soon publish *Lost to History? African American Abolitionists*, a study of the largely neglected UGRR support among Black communities and churches of the early-mid 19th C.