

KURC Greets and Hosts Ken Johnston. Who Re-trod Harriet Tubman's Original Escape Route to PA.



Walker extraordinaire Ken Johnston shortly after crossing over the Pennsylvania border, flanked by KURC Board member Crystal Crampton and KURC administrator Lynn Sinclair

One of the nicest things about having a new home is that one gets to invite people in to see it and to entertain them. The Kennett Underground Railroad Center did just that on Sunday, Feb. 16 of this new year.

And such guests! The leader of the party was 59 year old Ken Johnston, and his entourage was his greater family, all currently from Philadelphia. Johnston was in the process of re-enacting the trek first made by Harriet Tubman, in the fall of 1849, when she escaped bondage. In order to help family members and others achieve their freedom, she went back many times into the dangerous and hellish realm of slavery along the Eastern shore; but on that first morning, when she crossed into the free state of Pennsylvania, she recounted later, "I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person. There was a glory over everything; the sun came like gold through the trees, and I felt I was in Heaven."

Johnston had begun his re-enactment, which he dubbed "The Walk to Freedom," around Poplar Neck, site of the plantation of Tubman's supposed "owners." He set out on the night of Christmas evening, 2019, and hiked for 20 miles. At times, "it was so dark I couldn't see my feet." Though he broke up this pilgrimage into many weekends,

he wanted to get the feeling, that first night, of what it would be like to be alone and heading into unknown territory.

Lynn Sinclair, the administrator for KURC, first heard about Johnston's trek and urged the KURC Board and other local folks interested in history and Kennett Square, to greet him as he entered Pennsylvania. She and a few friends drove out early to encounter Johnston and his party--brother, nieces, nephews, and in-laws--around the Yorklyn, DE, area as he crossed the border. A number of us boarded a small bus and drove out to meet and cheer for the party as they appeared over a hill in the Southern Chester County Land Conservancy. Two reporters, a few kids, a dog, and one drone (looking for Johnston and company from the air) were part of the greeting party. Ironically, as it turned out, Johnston and company approached from behind us!

After cheering, photos and lots of talk, the enlarged group boarded the KURC bus and made our way back to the Johnson House, but with several significant stops.

First, we traveled to the Bucktoe cemetery, where KURC Board member Crystal Crampton explained to everyone the importance of this site, and the efforts that have been made to restore and maintain it. Crystal, a member of the New Garden Memorial UAME Church in Kennett Square, has been a primary caretaker, organizer, fund-raiser, and curator of the cemetery. In a very small space near the entrance to the grounds is the site of the original Bucktoe church, which was burned to the ground over a century ago, (alleg-

See "Ken Johnston and Harriet Tubman," p. 4



KURC Consolidates Our Collections and Prepares to Create a New Learning Center--by KURC Board Member Adrian Burston



2019 was a momentous year for the Kennett Underground Railroad Center. Having been “wandering in the wilderness,” so to speak, for eight years, we finally found a home in the Dr. Isaac Johnson House. Moving to the Center meant, among other things, that we could at last gather items collected over the years (and up until then stored in board members’ homes and other facilities) under one roof. Eclectic in nature, these items included a trundle bed, a replica of the wooden crate in which Henry “Box” Brown transported himself to freedom, a number of manikins in various conditions, a wooden wheelbarrow, and several large display cabinets.

We felt overwhelmed at first, but gradually a plan emerged. First, a small group of us went through each item deciding on what to keep. We then photographed each item so that we would have a visual record to add to our written

inventory. We then began discussing what and how things might best be displayed.

However, our plans changed. The Johnson House is also to become a Kennett Square Heritage Center open to the public (*see article on p. 3*) --in addition to being the KURC home-- some alterations would need to be made to the building. The result was that KURC lost one of the two rooms we were originally slated to occupy in the Johnson House. This constriction made our task easier in some ways. It meant that we no longer had to figure out how to display all our items, but had to sort through a second time and assign many of them back to storage or to be loaned out to other organizations, such as the Friends of Barnard Station.

Our work has only just begun, however. At a recent board meeting, Debbie Burston, chair of the Marketing Committee, presented their vision of what the Center might look like. She proposed that KURC focus on its primary mission of education and research and that the room be set up accordingly. After some discussion, the Board agreed to the proposal. To this end, we have recently purchased a double desk, two office chairs, three wall cabinets to use as bookshelves, and a printer/copier/scanner.

Board members and others have brought in dozens of books and pamphlets relevant to our research efforts, and a system is being established to allow members and visitors to borrow these works.

We are not finished, though. In the coming months we hope to add a computer and a touch-screen Promethian Board for interactive teaching and learning. Displays of local buildings involved in the UGRR will be featured as each is studied and researched. We also hope to use QR codes throughout the Heritage Center to make an interesting, interactive scavenger hunt for children and adults alike.

In addition, we now have a commodious and attractive meeting room for our monthly meetings and other occasions. (*See the wide-angle shots above*).

These are exciting and innovative times for KURC.



Kennett Heritage Center Planned for North Union St.

For many years people in the Kennett Community have wanted a history and information center available to residents and tourists alike, and thanks to the diligence and hard work of Lynn Sinclair that desire is coming to fruition. The Kennett Heritage Center was established on Jan. 9, 2020 as a nonprofit organization. The mission of the organization is to foster a greater understanding and appreciation for the significant role our community played in the history of Pennsylvania and the United States. The Center will encourage visitors to fully engage in the authentic experience offered by the preservation of that historic landscape through tours, special events, and an educational kiosk.

Sinclair owns the building at 120 N. Union Street and plans are underway to create the Heritage Center in the house, historically owned by Dr. Isaac Johnson. The Center will be modeled after the Marshallton Village Heritage Center, which opened in October 2018. The Center will include static and interactive displays of the history of the Kennett area during the 1700s, 1800s and 1900s. Miller Designworks, which created the exhibit at Marshallton, is working with Kennett Heritage Center Board of Directors to design the displays for the Kennett Heritage Center. The organization will begin fundraising in early spring

with hopes to open the center late summer or early fall. For more information on the Kennett Heritage Center, please reach out to Lynn Sinclair at lynn@thesunsetfarm.net



Rendering of renovated front porch and entrance to the building at 120 N. Union Street, making way for the Kennett Heritage Center

Recommended Articles and Websites by KURC Members

Members of the current KURC Board of Directors, past BOD members, and friends of our purpose are often searching publications and websites for new information about our topic. These efforts are part of our mission: *“to preserve the heritage and engage the public about the historic abolitionists and freedom seekers of this area and beyond.”*

It was recently suggested that these many readings be shared more broadly with you, our readers and new members. While not all of these items are readily available, they can be found in libraries or by subscription to journals and online sources. Each item will be accompanied by a brief description or explanation.

• **Boylan, Ann, “Delaware’s African American Suffragists.” *Delaware History*, Fall-Winter, 2019-2020, 106-148.** Boylan is one of the writers who portray a number of women whose work in the Equal Suffrage Study Club and around Howard School in the late 19th-early 20th century helped raise support for women’s suffrage and the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

• **Gopnik, Adam. “Uncivil Wars.” *The New Yorker*, Feb. 10, 2020, 66-69.** Gopnik reviews the book *Congress at*

War, by Fergus A. Bordewich (Knopf, 2020), in which the author makes the argument that, despite what he claims was Lincoln’s *lack of leadership*, the so-called Radical Republicans of Congress, particularly Thaddeus Stevens and Ben Wade, were responsible for winning the war, securing the end of slavery and enfranchisement of African Americans.

Gopnik is very good at generously outlining another side’s arguments--and then demolishing those with his own. He does so convincingly and eloquently in this article.

See “Recommended Articles, etc.” p. 5

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“Ken Johnston and Harriet Tubman,” continued from p. 1



KURC Board President John O’Neal at Bucktoe Cemetery explaining to Ken Johnston the importance of the Grand Army of the Republic, the post-Civil War fraternal organization of all Union military forces, which was well-known for its commitment to integration at a time when America was settling into segregation and Jim Crow.

edly by “white lightning,” necessitating the congregation’s move to Linden Street in Kennett Square.)

The bus then visited a few sites that are part of the routine KURC UGRR tours--the Longwood Progressive Meeting of Friends near Longwood Gardens, where Tubman’s friend and colleague Thomas Garrett became a regular attendee; the Pines House, home to three UGRR stationmasters, at the entrance to KS; and the Harriet Tubman mural off Willow Street. After those stops, the bus came back to the Johnson House for a reception and lunch.

There we learned more about Johnston and his motivations. This was only the latest in a series of lengthy treks he has undertaken. After having sat for decades behind a computer, Johnston felt a great urge “to move.” A long-time resident of Massachusetts, he was inspired ten years ago at Ted Kennedy’s death, learning of the Senator’s love of that state. So, beginning in lovely Williamstown in the NW corner of the state, Johnston walked --by weekend stages-- all the way to Provincetown, the tip of Cape Cod.



Johnston’s interest in history grew out of his walking excursions. Next was a pilgrimage following the paths of the 1960s Civil Rights marchers going from

Selma, to Montgomery; in addition he walked to Memphis, where Martin Luther King was assassinated. Johnston learned that people in Ireland, inspired by King and the Selma march, made annual marches from Belfast to Londonderry in Northern Ireland, to commemorate a 1969 march for civil rights on that island. In 2018 he made that march, and thinks he is the only person to have done both. He also made a significant hike across Puerto Rico after the devastation of Hurricane Maria in 2017.

Johnston’s primary source of information on Tubman has been Kate Clifford Larson’s 2004 biography, *Bound for the Promised Land*, widely considered the definitive work on Tubman thus far. We informed Johnston that Larson had been a guest of KURC one year ago, at Kennett Friends Meeting, where she spoke to and enthralled a packed meeting house. Asked if he planned to do this Tubman pilgrimage



age again, he said he wasn’t sure, but thought there might be real interest on the part of others to join him if he did it again.

As we ate lunch around our meeting table, Johnston praised KURC and his other greeters, saying that he had never had such a welcoming party in his travels. And he reminded us also

that he wasn’t done; the following weekend, he would pick up his journey again, until he reached the point where Harriet Tubman met--for the first of many occasions--UGRR stationmaster and historian William Still in Philadelphia. Still’s 1872 work called *The Underground Railroad* was the first book about this heroic enterprise.

More than a decade ago, Ken Johnston discovered a new purpose to his life. “If you want to be free, keep moving,” he said, speaking both for himself and freedom-seekers 160+ years ago. He also mentioned that his cardiologist in Massachusetts once told him, “I don’t know what you’re doing--but keep doing it! You’re in great shape.”

In his undertakings and symbolic journeys, he has brought himself health and fulfillment, and he has become an inspiration for many people in this country--and beyond.

Above: Johnston’s nephew inspecting at a headstone
Left: restored headstone at Bucktoe cemetery

"Recommended Articles, Etc.," continued from p. 3

Blairsville Area Underground Railroad. <https://undergroundrailroadblairsvillepa.com/>

This video presents an inclusive interpretation of the UGRR and struggle for freedom and equal rights while equally highlighting interracial collaboration. I am especially informed by the intersections of local, on-the-ground efforts and regional and national events/history (i.e. local resident's involvement in the Free State Kansas movement and John Brown's Harpers Ferry raid; the two USCTs from Indiana County who were Medal of Honor recipients; pro-slavery James Buchanan's 1856 presidential campaign; enslaved people aiding and protecting Union soldiers, etc).

(Thanks to Cheryl Gooch for this summary.)

SUNY Binghamton Professor Anne Bailey Interviewed About Her Project Documenting Where Slaves Were Sold in U.S. – The Reconstruction Era

<https://thereconstructionera.com/suny-binghamton-professor-anne-bailey-interviewed-about-her-project-documenting-where-slaves-were-sold-in-u-s/>

WNYC's Brian Lehrer spoke to history professor Bailey about her project to locate and photograph the sites where slaves were auctioned in the United States. Most were in the South, but one of the sites she located was in East Brunswick, New Jersey. You can listen to the interview using the website. A 10 minute interview, richly detailed, powerful, and moving.

15 African American Museums and Historical Sites to Visit in the U.S. | AFAR

<https://www.afar.com/magazine/african-american-museums-historical-sites-united-states?>

Not all sites are completed, but this website gives those interested in learning more about the role of African Americans and black culture in this country. Most sites are east of the Mississippi, but not all, ranging from Boston to Denver, from Detroit to New Orleans.

"Carpetbagging," by Mark E. Dixon

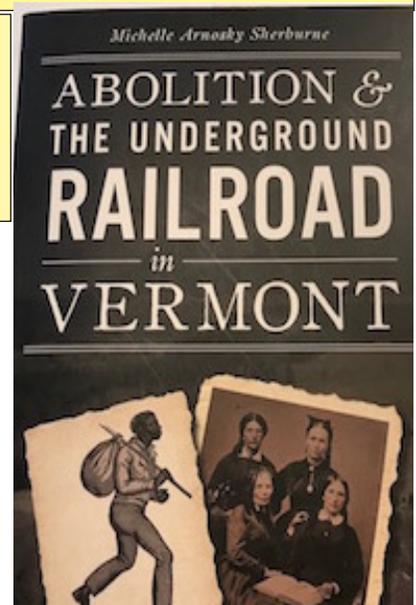
<https://mainlinetoday.com/life-style/carpetbagging/>
Dixon details the idealism, limited success, and ultimate failure of a 19th C. Chester County abolitionist, J. William Thorne, who, with his wife, moved to North Carolina to run for office after the end of the Civil War. Unlike the usual Southern image of Northern carpetbaggers--money-grubbing con-men, wishing to cash in on the South's misery--the Thornes were hoping to create a culture of tolerance and respect for democracy and civil rights. It didn't happen..

In each *Lantern*, we hope to review a recently-published work that deals with the issues and historical time period that is the focus of the KURC.

This brief book examines a state that, as regards 19th C. abolition and support for the Underground Railroad, was both very comparable and very different from Pennsylvania. On the one hand, Vermont was well-known as an anti-slavery state. Establishing itself as a sovereign state in 1777, it banned slavery from that date. When it entered the United States in 1791, it was the only state that was completely devoid of slavery. However, as Sherburne writes, "Vermont contradicted itself on all fronts," (p. 21). The famous abolitionist Congressman Thaddeus Stevens was born in Vermont, and abolitionist journalists William Lloyd Garrison, Oliver Johnson, and Horace Greeley began their careers in the state. There were literally dozens of anti-slavery societies within Vermont.

And yet the average Vermonter, while anti-slavery, was distrustful of abolitionism and openly racist. Just as was the case in Pennsylvania, there were riots and mobs that opposed abolitionist speakers, even when they were their own townspeople. In one famous instance, in the town of Canaan in neighboring New Hampshire near the Vermont border, a white mob descended on a school for black children, uprooted the building, and, with dozens of horses, hauled it out of town. One might say that was less violent than burning it down, and no students were injured; but it showed a powerful sense of opposition to African American presence and equality. It is not surprising that the 1860 census showed 315,000 whites and 707 blacks (p.22).

This book, however, does highlight some real differences between abolitionism and the UGRR in Vermont and in Pennsylvania. To begin with, very few of those identified in this book as agents were Quakers. There were Unitarians, Methodists, and Baptists but few if any Quakers. While Sherburne has discovered the names of a few African Americans who aided freedom seekers, Vermont lacked the numbers and in particular the black communities that made it much easier for black fugitives to find a welcome in southern PA. It is also surprising to see the number of politically and financially well-established men



See "Vermont UGRR," p. 6

2019 Annual Appeal Exceeds All Previous Efforts

The Kennett Underground Railroad Center had something to brag about--the acquisition of a new home, an actual “center,” for the first time since 2012. 120 North Union Street was once owned by Dr. Isaac Johnson, abolitionist and benefactor of at least one freedom-seeker, Johnson Hayes Walker.

We also had a considerable challenge--affording the rent and renovation costs of transforming our portion of this old dwelling into the kind of learning center we have long dreamed of. That challenge has in large part been met by the energy and vision of some new (as well as old) Board members--and by the generosity of you new members and old friends. As of late February, the yield in this year’s annual appeal has amounted to **\$8485**.

Here is a listing of those who gave according to the new categories that were created last fall.

Abolitionists

- Alton & Betty Boyer
- Mary Jo Ciganek
- Mary Etta Clenendin
- Marsha Corum
- Richard & Theresa Forte
- Maryanne Gallucci
- Katharine T. & Paul Gamble
- Margie & Walt Herbert
- Carolee W. Kiernan
- Bob & Ellen Kurtz
- Pete & Sandy Lee
- Eileen Mallouk
- Debra Campagnari Martin
- John Meadows
- Rev. Susan Scott
- D Lynn Sinclair
- Virginia Turner
- Barbara Wall

Station Masters

- Adrian & Debbie Burston
- Neil & Elizabeth Cullen

Agents

- Matland D Crosson
- Jessica Daly
- Paul Dittmer
- Owen Dugan
- Sally Flynn
- Karen Marshall
- Dorothy Ortaldo
- Bill & Grace Pfeifer
- Lynn Powell
- Sandy Reber
- Stephen Roberts
- Dr. Albert J. Schmitt
- Joel & Judith Somerick
- Bill & Gail Van Wie

Thomas Garrett Society

- Louis Roemer
- Michele Sullivan

Mary Dugan Circle-Life Time Membership

- Nancy Pennock Sagar

Conductors

- Anonymous
- Susanna Davison
- Ben Dugan & Jennifer Johnson
- Barbara Hallowell
- Kathryn Head
- Ann-Louise & Chad Jeffery
- Richard Kline
- Carole Landefeld
- Charles Lewis
- Sharon A. Leyhow
- Marilyn & Terence Maguire
- Gerry McFarren & Kathy McMahan
- John & Judy O’Neal
- Richard Pennock
- Elizabeth L. Solomon

Harriet Tubman Society

- Ingrid and Robert Coutts

Continued from “Vermont UGRR,” p. 5

involved in UGRR activity. Lawrence Brainerd, for example, was one of the developers of actual railroads in Vermont. William Sowles of Swanton Vermont was a bank president and pillar of his community. Titus Hutchinson of Woodstock was a U.S. Attorney for Vermont, later a state judge, and even the Chief Judge of the Vermont Supreme Court. Lyman Hinckley in

Post Mills was a mill owner and industrialist. Joseph Poland of Montpelier and Theophilus Harrington were state judges. William Slade and Richard Skinner were actually governors of Vermont. The average Vermonter may have been opposed to abolition, but some of its most prominent citizens were decidedly not.

This book, while written in a somewhat plodding style, is a fine source

of good stories of persons dedicated to the abolition of slavery, and, in many cases, to the equality of all people. I particularly recommend the tales of Vermont native Delia Webster, an “in-your-face” abolitionist if ever there was one. Sherburne makes very clear how torn and troubled even the most northern states were on the issue of slavery.

The book will soon be available for borrowing from the KURC Learning Center.

“No Irish Need Apply”

A Saint Patrick’s Day Reflection by Terence James Patrick Maguire

In the early half of the 19th C., those words—or the acronym NINA—were commonly posted in places of potential employment in America. For people of the time with names like the one above right, it meant, “Don’t even bother to ask! If you are from that unfortunate island off the west coast of blessed England, we are not interested in employing you.” The Irish were scorned for many reasons. In a predominantly Protestant country, they were Catholic, and many Americans saw the “Romish pope” as a sinister force in the world. More than that, they were the least respected of any people of the British Isles. True British might look down their nose at the Scots, the Welsh, or the Cornish; but all of them felt themselves well above the Irish. Oppressed, exploited, often starving, the Irish were typically blamed for their poverty—pretty much the same way that many people today blame our underclass citizens for the conditions they did not choose for themselves.

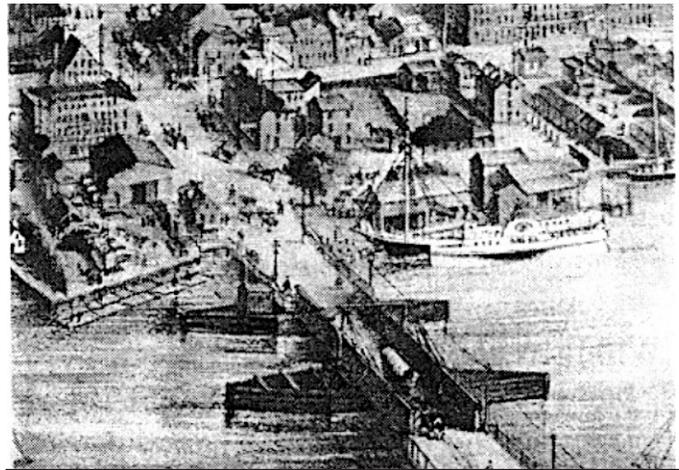
If there were some sociometric gauge for assessing rank, the Irish would have been rated slightly above those of African descent, but only slightly. Sadly but predictably, those two demographic groups did not become allies but rather competitors for the lowest paying jobs offered by the Protestant middle and upper classes. In our region clashes took place between the two groups. In a letter to William Still, 11/5/1857, Thomas Garrett recounts that one party of fugitives, “were attacked with clubs by several Irishmen, and one was shot in the forehead,” but survived. When UGRR stationmaster Dr. Bartholomew Fussell allegedly said that Black people would make better citizens than the Irish would, he was assaulted by angry workers from Hagley Powder Works (one of the few places Irish were permitted to work).

If Fussell did make that statement, it was probably in reference to a widespread stereotype about Irish immigrants—

that they were excessive drinkers and therefore unreliable. Others of that time, including Thoreau in *Walden*, referred to the Irish so; later writers, such as Eugene O’Neill, did little to dispel this image.

However, on one occasion, Thomas Garrett used the stereotype to advantage for those seeking freedom. According to Priscilla Thompson’s 1986 article on Garrett for *Delaware History*, slave hunters often watched the Market Street Bridge over the Christina River (*pictured below*); and on one occasion it was obviously guarded by such folks. Garrett employed his friend Patrick Holland and several of Holland’s fellow Irishmen to take a wagon filled with picnic gear across the bridge south. They were in rowdy spirits heading out, and many hours later returned, “apparently” drunken. The guards, remembering them, just let them pass. This time, however, the party-goers had concealed beneath their blankets a family of fugitives. Garrett then paid Holland to convey the freedom-seekers to their next station.

Sometimes, Irish *could apply*—and be gratefully hired.



Courtesy of the Delaware Historical Society

Scheduled KURC Heritage Bus Tours for 2020

Our family-friendly tours are led by knowledgeable guides in a comfortable, climate-controlled bus. We visit documented Underground Railroad sites, historic homes and Quaker Meetinghouses while learning about local abolitionists and anti-slavery activity including the contributions of local African Americans and their faith communities. These two-hour tours start at 1:30 pm at the Brandywine Valley Tourism Information Center, 300 Greenwood Road, Kennett Square 19348

April 26

May 17

June 21

July 19

August 16

September 20

October 18

For more tour information and to register using Eventbrite, please visit the Events Section of our Facebook page or website.

Private tours may also be arranged.

Contact us by phone (484)-544-5070, or email info@kennettundergroundrr.org.



More Photos from the Ken Johnston Visit--2-16-2020

*Above: Ken Johnston, his brother and family members with Crystal Crampton at Bucktoe Cemetery.
Below: Ken Johnston poses with KURC Board members outside the Johnson House.*



In Praise of Lynn D. Sinclair

*Everyone involved in this event, both guests and greeters, is grateful for the foresight, attention to detail, energy, and sense of history demonstrated by Lynn. She was the first to see the educational opportunity Ken Johnston's arrival represented, and she worked hard to make it all happen and to make us all happy.
Thank you, Lynn.*