

Kennett Square Celebrates Juneteenth

On June 18th, 2021, President Joseph R. Biden signed a bill declaring that, henceforth, Juneteenth would be a national holiday. In this time of intense partisan rancor, it is little short of a miracle that Congress would pass such a bill with overwhelming bipartisan support—but they did. Good for them! In a sense the United States was catching up with many other locations around the country, including Kennett Square.

For the third year of the last four, various local organizations of Kennett Square, including KURC, combined to commemorate Juneteenth. This year, the event was bigger than ever, and it was also part of a county-wide celebrations arranged by a consortium that will be detailed below.

In Kennett Square, no one was more engaged or responsible for Kennett Square's Juneteenth 2021 than Lynn Sinclair, administrator of KURC, co-founder of the Kennett Heritage Center, and member of the Chester County Historic Preservation Network (CCHPN). Therefore we asked Sinclair to answer some questions about this year's event.



- * Karen Marshall – Kennett Heritage Center; CCHPN
- * Claire Murray – Historic Kennett Square
- * John Catlett – Kennett Library
- * Brenda Mercomes – Kennett Library Board & Kennett Square Borough Council, president
- * Ken Johnston _Kennett Heritage Center
- * Debbie Burston – Kennett Underground Railroad Center
- * Crystal Crampton – New Garden Memorial UAME Church, Kennett Underground Railroad Center, Bucktoe site coordinator

• *What snags or problems did the committee run into, and how were they solved (if at all?)*

There were no major problems.

• *The Longwood Cemetery tour was not offered after all. Were any of the other original plans (e.g., the Mini-Film Festival) canceled, and why?*

There were no cancellations, really. The Longwood Cemetery Tour was available via a QR code on the Cemetery sign. The films were uploaded to YouTube and can be viewed at any time.

• *What do you feel were the most successful aspects of the celebration?*

I felt that all of the activities contributed to the success of the Juneteenth celebration. There was something for everyone. Families loved the lantern making workshop, story time with Linda Harris of “We Walk with Harriet,” the Journeying to Freedom Walk and, of course, the ice cream social and lantern parade.



• *Who were the other members of the Committee that settled on the plans for Kennett Square's Juneteenth plans?*

A Juneteenth QR Walk Around the Block



Covid. That was our first and last thought when we decided to create QR codes for our Juneteenth celebration. In January and February KURC knew that we wanted to celebrate Juneteenth as we had done in 2019 and earlier; however, it would need to look a great deal

We selected stories written by past and present members of KURC to illustrate the excitement and danger of living in and around Kennett Square in the early-mid 1800's. We included tales of attempted kidnappings, freedom-seekers and UGRR agents. The stories were recorded with audio and placed with the written versions on the QR code so those who did not wish to read could simply listen. By turning up the volume on your phone, you could share the stories with your family. We sent people off on their walk with a map to follow and, if unfamiliar with QR codes, a written copy of the walk. We also prepared goodie bags for those who completed the walk.

Our Walk Around the Block appeared on the streets of Kennett Square on the Juneteenth weekend of June 19th and 20th. It took people back to the 1700's and the laying out of State Street and Union Street

different than it had in the past.

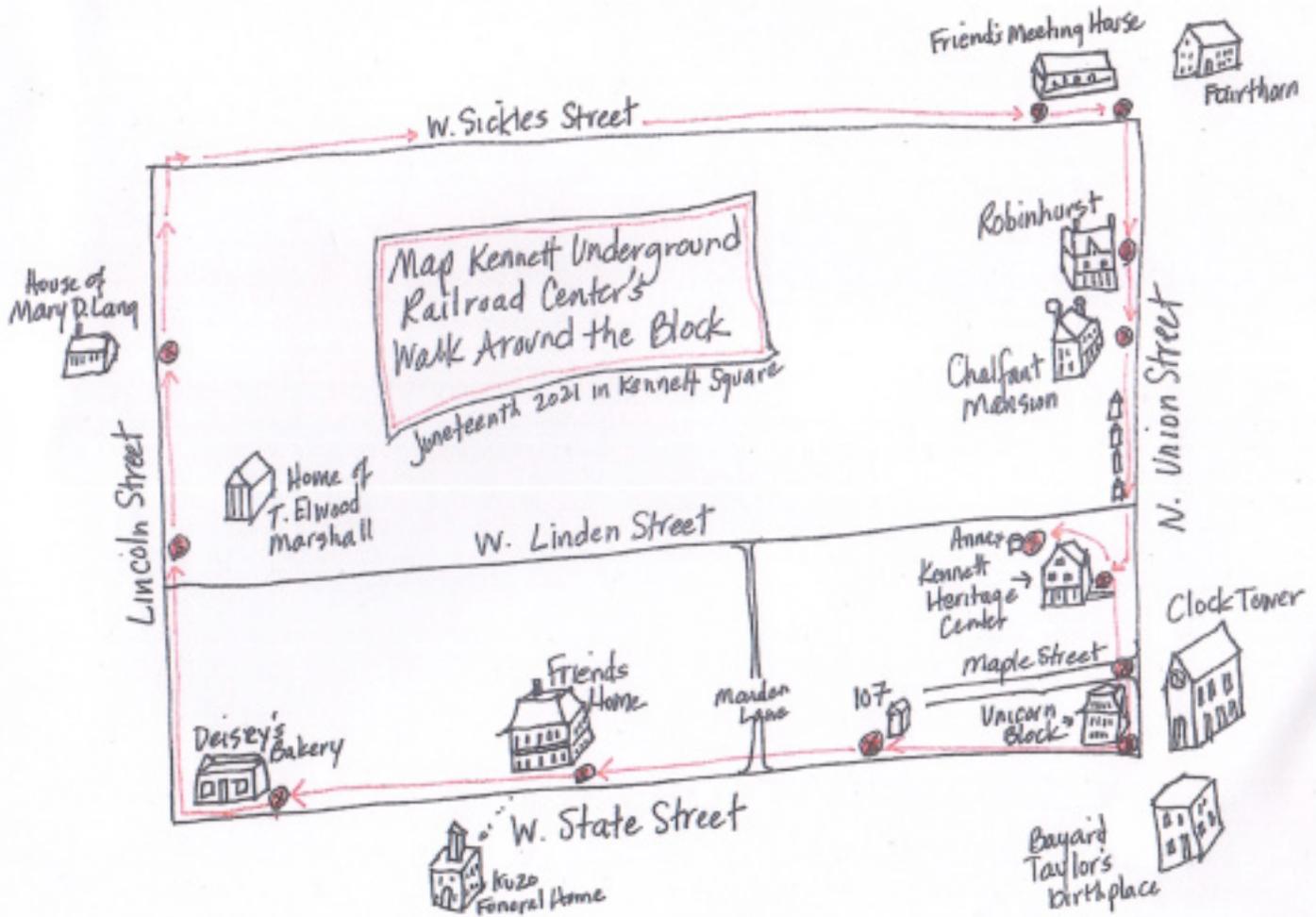
We needed a way to share our stories of the Underground Railroad without telling them face-to-face. As QR codes are showing up more and more in our everyday lives, from cereal boxes to menus in restaurants, it seemed the best way to bring our stories to the public and not endanger anyone with close encounters. Visitors could use their own phones or tablets; contact would be at a minimum. So, QR codes became our strategy.

Originally, we had hoped to use Nixon Park as our trail and link our stories to the many areas of the park. Not many UGRR events took place in towns and cities, as most freedom seekers stayed away from crowded areas; but they did take place in woods, along streams, crossing bodies of water, and even over bridges, so the park would be the perfect place to bring in all these elements. We began collecting stories to use and set out looking for just the right spots to place our QR codes. However, we discovered that the park was undergoing construction work; therefore, we needed to think again.

We started to work on **The Juneteenth Walk 2.0**. Located as we are at 120 N. Union Street in Kennett Square, we realized that history was all around us in the buildings and down the streets. The solution was have our walk simply go around the block. We would meld the two histories together, that of Kennett Square and of the Underground Railroad. After all, the two are virtually inseparable.

One of those who took this QR walk was Linda Traver, member of Kennett Friends Meeting and volunteer at the Bethel AME after school program. She enjoyed bonding with others taking the tour and learning more about Kennett history. She summed up the feeling of many: "I am so grateful to live in a community where there is a real effort to bring its history to light, to highlight the progress made, and to openly work to bring the community together to care about and celebrate each other."





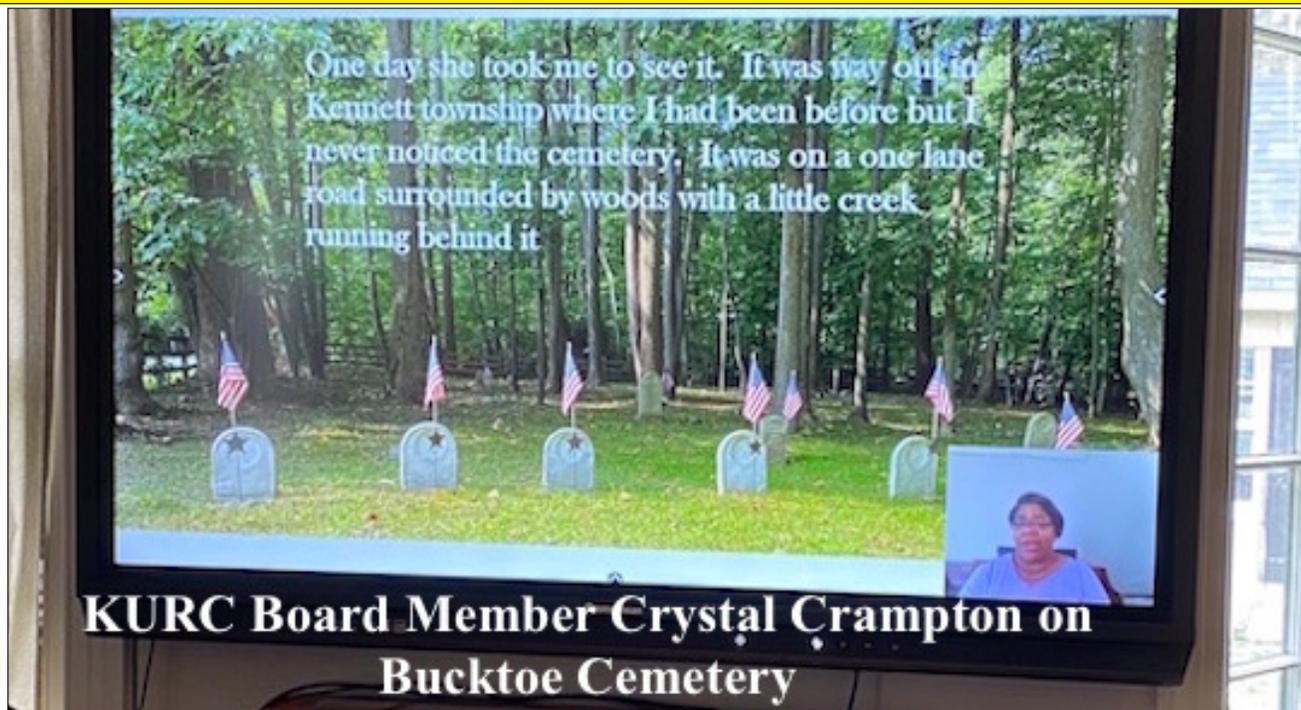
while standing on the corner in front of the Unicorn Tavern (now the Maura Grace Boutique). As visitors walked around the block, they were also told stories of people and places around Kennett Square who had been involved in the Underground Railroad, and the exciting and remarkable events that had taken place in the area. Kennett Square, being so close to the borders of Delaware and Maryland, was truly on the front lines of a war for freedom.

If you missed coming out to take the tour on those two rather hot and humid days, we hope to be able to repeat the walk for you. We will let you know well ahead of time so you can make your plans to **Walk Around the Block!**

Shown here are two of the QR Codes at the entrance to the Kennett Heritage Center and on the porch next to a 19th C wheelbarrow that figures in one of the stories included in the walking tour. Above is the map used for the tour.

Debbie Burston is a KURC Board member and the Secretary of the Board.





One of the attractions offered in the Kennett Heritage Center on Juneteenth was a video prepared by KURC Board member Crystal Crampton with help from Lynn Sinclair. This video was witnessed by dozens of interested persons. It gives a brief history of the formation of African American churches such as the African Methodist Episcopal and Union American Methodist Episcopal. Crampton's narrative goes from history to personal experience. Her grandmother introduced her to the site of the original Bucktoe church and cemetery. In addition to service to her New Garden Memorial UAME church on Linden St., the exploration, restoration and maintenance of this cemetery has become one of the Crystal's most important aspirations and achievements.

Did you miss this fine educational experience? Contact KURC at info@kennettundergroundrr.org, and we can set up a viewing.

KURC Board of Directors

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Crystal Crampton was also one of the prime organizers, along with Rev. Beverly Bell of New Garden Memorial's lunch program, "Feed the Soul," which supplied hungry celebrants of Kennett's Juneteenth with 375 (!) delicious box lunches--either baked chicken or fried fish, along with side dishes and cake. The neighboring Bethel AME church, under the leadership of Reverend Lilieth Baugh, supplied many gallons of rich mushroom soup as part of that lunch program.

from p. 1, "KS Celebrates Juneteenth,"

enough for social distancing, with tables and chairs, a P/A system, air conditioning, and more than one restroom.

• *To what extent did you coordinate with the larger, county-wide celebration run by Voices Underground and Square Roots Collective?*

Chester County Juneteenth Festival 2021 was a collaborative project organized by the Chester County History Center, the Chester County Historic Preservation Network, the Chester County Planning Commission, and Voices Underground. Initially – in January, VU organized the

channels through which all the different organizations would work and to whom they would report. As a former chair of two different historical commissions and

a member of CCHPN, I was asked if Kennett Heritage Center would participate.

• *Do you have any sense of how many people came to visit the Heritage*

Center and KURC's room during those two days?

I would guess that at least 50-75 people came to the Center and viewed the slide show on the History of New Garden Memorial UAME Church and took the Journeying to Freedom walk.

• *How many were involved in or attended the other activities: Lantern-Making, Ice cream Social, Gooch/54th, Oni Lasana, other?*

Another guess – around 30 people for each of those activities.

• *What aspects of Juneteenth 2021 will be utilized for 2022?*

We've made notes of what was good and what needs to change. Really, everything was good, but three days was too long!

Getting ready for the Lantern Parade



Saturday's offerings appealed more to adults. Dr. Cheryl Gooch's talk, "Agents of Emancipation" focused on the US Colored Troops from Hinsonville (Oxford) and their service to end slavery. After Dr. Gooch's talk, re-enactors from Company B, 54th Massachusetts answered questions from the audience. Oni Lasana's one-woman performance, called "Always Free- A Juneteenth Celebration," used the poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar to tell a personal story of enslavement and liberation. Especially moving was the lone soldier standing beside the storyteller when she related the pride she felt as her husband marched off to war.

• *How much did the leasing of the American Legion Hall cost, and did it turn out to be an effective venue for the various activities?*

Considering that we had to have our plans together in March and that we didn't know how the pandemic would be affecting us in June, I think we made the right decision to rent the American Legion building. It cost \$1,100 for two days. We needed a space large



Massachusetts 54th Re-enactors



Scheduled KURC Heritage Bus Tours for 2021

Our two-hour bus tours take place (generally) on the third Sunday of each month. They begin at the Brandywine Valley Tourism office on 300 Greenwood Road, outside Longwood Gardens, at 1:30 P.M.

August 15 September 19 October 17

For more tour information and to register using Eventbrite, please visit the Events Section of our Facebook page or our website (kennettundergroundrr.org). Registration can also be made via email or voicemail. Private tours may also be arranged.

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

After fifteen months of non-contact communication with the public, the Kennett Underground Railroad Center is back in business! In addition to our participation in last month's Juneteenth celebration, our tours have begun again--in earnest. We have been able to give our tours on June 20, June 27, July 7, July 12, and July 18. While only three more are scheduled for the year, private tours can be arranged.

The July 7 tour, for example, was for a Mendenhall family reunion. A group of Mendenhall descendants and spouses (shown below), staying (appropriately) in

the Mendenhall Inn, came to enjoy the summer splendor of Longwood Gardens, Winterthur, and other sites; but they also wanted to know more about the heritage of their forebears, Isaac and Dinah Mendenhall, who acted as UGRR stationkeepers for over thirty years. We passed by the two homes owned by the Isaac and Dinah, and the modern-day Mendenhalls heard stories of their courage and fortitude in the face of local disapproval and the dangers of arrest, prosecution, fines, and forfeiture that came with their illegal but profoundly moral activity. They also learned that three centuries ago, the first Mendenhall landowner of the region, Benjamin, was granted one thousand acres for a pretty good price: six bushels of "marketable" wheat to be delivered to the Penn family in March of every year during Benjamin's life and those of his descendants. Mark and Nancy Mendenhall of Florida, organizers of this trip, were pretty sure those payments had been discontinued.

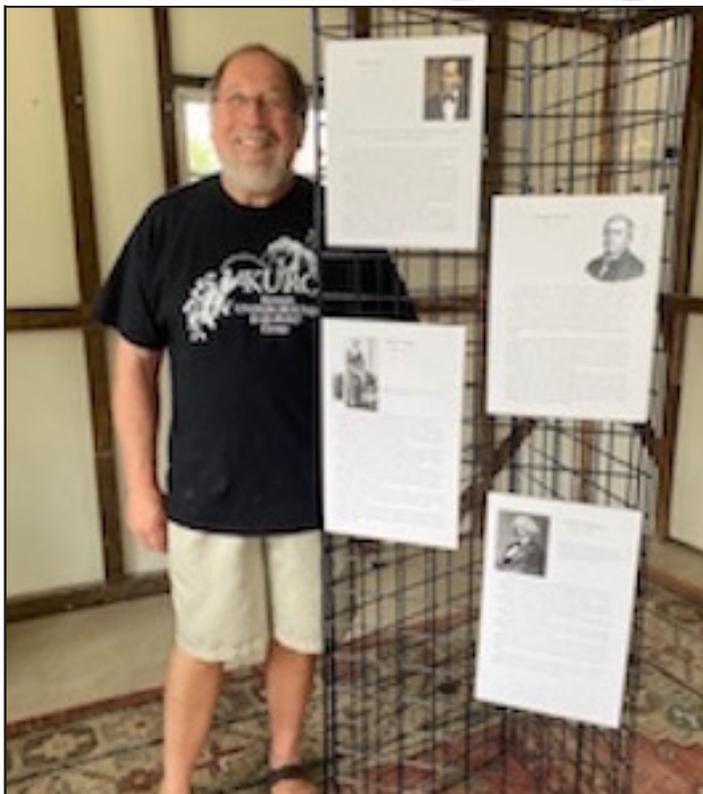
Later we visited the Longwood Cemetery, where those forebears are laid to rest, and enjoyed the hospitality of the Brandywine Valley Tourism Bureau, ordinarily closed on a Tuesday but opened to accommodate this tour. The Mendenhalls were a gracious and deeply engaged group, and it was a pleasure to share our knowledge with them.

In addition to tours, we at KURC are ready to make presentations to schools, historical societies, churches, and other social organizations. If you are looking for speakers on topics regarding the 19th C fight for abolition in local history, or just good storytellers, please contact us at the addresses shown below.





Ken Johnston organizing the lantern parade, June 18



Oni Lasana performing as Mary Ella Grandberry in “Always Free--a Juneteenth Celebration”

KURC Board member and Vice President Adrian Burston showing off his KURC Juneteenth T-shirt and standing in the Johnson House annex, where shirts, mugs with the KURC logo, and publications on the local UGRR were on sale on Juneteenth. The KURC office and the Kennett Heritage Center were staffed by Lynn Sinclair, Adrian and his wife Debbie, Board members Dick Kittle, Darleen Amobi, Terry Maguire, and Michele Sullivan, and former Board members Chris Densmore and John O’Neal. Though she could not be with us in Kennett Square, Board member tonya thames-taylor sent out a celebratory video on the history of Juneteenth and her personal connection with the holiday. It is found on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/oU2WPJzDCM>.

O'Neal's History Notes

KURC President Emeritus John O'Neal spends much time looking for material relevant to the time --19th C--and the issues central to the Kennett Underground Railroad Center--the struggle to abolish slavery, the heroism of those who sought freedom and those who helped them, and the never-ending striving toward equality among the races in America.



- Harriet Tubman's lost Maryland home found, archaeologists say

<https://tinyurl.com/s4tezmt4>

The famed abolitionist's father, Ben Ross, sheltered her and family on the Eastern Shore in the 1840s. A photo shows Harriet Tubman sometime between 1860 and 1875. (Harvey B. Lindsley/Library of Congress/AP)
By Michael E. Ruane, April 20, 2021 at 11:00 a.m. ED

- THE 'OTHER' UNDERGROUND RAILROAD—AND HOW JUNETEENTH CAME TO BE

<https://tinyurl.com/4akatrwe>

- How a simple cotton sack tells an Intergenerational story of Separation Under Slavery

<https://tinyurl.com/cp73jy7>

- Bidy Mason - Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biddy_Mason. Bidy Mason (August 15, 1818 – January 15, 1891) was an African-American nurse and a Californian real estate entrepreneur and philanthropist. She was one of the founders of the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, California. Enslaved upon birth, she developed a variety of skills and developed knowledge of medicine, child care, and livestock care.

<https://www.officeholidays.com/byday/emancipation>
Emancipation Day holidays 2021 around the world. These holidays are observed to commemorate the end of slavery around the Americas. They mainly celebrate France, Britain, and Holland abolishing slavery in the 19th C.

Hockessin Historical Society Hosts a Juneteenth Celebration

KURC Board member Darleen Amobi not only attended KURC's Juneteenth celebration--reading stories to children at the Heritage Center-- but organized another celebration in nearby Hockessin.

Darleen, the long-time Vice-President of Hockessin Historical Society, worked with new President Peter Seeley to invite a sizable crowd to the Memorial Hall of the Hockessin Fire Company. Leading into the auditorium was an interesting display of Hockessin historical memorabilia. After introductory remarks, they were followed by New Castle County Executive Matt Meyer, who issued the following proclamation:

"It's my honor to declare June 19th a holiday to recognize the Juneteenth celebration, here in New Castle County. This Friday, we join together as one County to celebrate this critical day in United States history - the announcement of the abolition of slavery in the State of Texas and the emancipation of enslaved African-Americans throughout the former Confederate States of America. We must do more, and we will do more to ensure equality and equity in our society and across our County."

The primary speakers of the evening were historian Syl Woolford and re-enactor Willis Phelps. Woolford explained the background of the Juneteenth occasion but noted that Delaware was a slave state until the ratification of the 13th Amendment--a ratification the DE state legislature didn't approve of until 1901!

Phelps (below) re-enacted the story of Private James Elbert, a volunteer for Colored Troops of the Union army: his deeds as a soldier, the injuries he sustained, and the struggles he faced once the war was over in receiving medical help for those injuries. Sadly, America seemed to forget the invaluable contributions of the 400,000 Colored Troops that tipped the balance of combat in favor of the Union. *Let us henceforth remember and honor those men and their sacrifices.*



Purchase KURC Merchandise to Help Support Our Mission and Organization

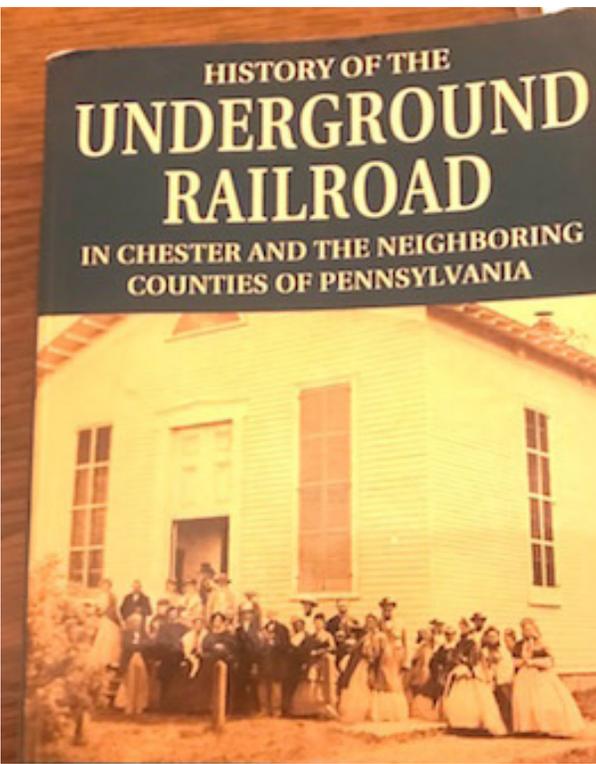
Friends of the Kennett Underground Railroad Center:

To fulfill our mission, "to preserve and celebrate the heritage and engage the public about the historic abolitionists, Underground Railroad agents, and freedom seekers of this area and beyond," and to meet the expanded costs of having a true center, KURC has decided to offer items for sale to our loyal readers.

- T-shirts with the KURC logo and
- T-shirts w/ the logo & the Juneteenth 2021 slogan "Journey toward Freedom" \$16.00 each
- coffee/tea mugs with our logo \$12.00
- booklets by KURC co-founder Frances Cloud Taylor,
 - The Trackless Trail* (36 pp) & *The Trackless Trail Leads* (82pp); \$5.00 each
- RC. Smedley's 1881 *The History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and Neighboring Counties of PA*, reprinted with an introduction by Christopher Densmore, retired Curator of Friends Historical Library and former Board member of KURC; \$15.00
- the colorful KURC map of UGRR stations in the Kennett area of Chester County, created in 2011 by local artist C.J. Ciganek-- \$15.00

Below are photos of these items. If you wish to purchase any, please contact us at info@kennettundergroundrr.org, or leave us a Voicemail: 484-544-5070.





The map below is about 3 ft by 2 ft and is very appropriate for classrooms, libraries, and dens.

KENNETT AREA UNDERGROUND RAILROAD NETWORK

Isaac and Dinah Mendenhall

"For your works of love, and duty, that know no selfish ends... Blessings upon you! what you did, for that good suffering one, Harriet and I find and marvel with your land was done!"
— For John and Hannah Cox, by John Greenleaf Whittier

"Judge, you have not left me a Brother, but I wish to see you and to sit on the Greenbank that sweeps beyond a College and sends a shadow and a shadow down from the Temple of Liberty and the old England land."
— Thomas Garrett

*Follow the drinking gourd,
Follow the drinking gourd,
For the old man is coming for to
carry you to freedom...
Follow the drinking gourd.*

Drawn by M.J. Ciganek for Kennett Underground Railroad Center - Second Edition 2011