

KURC Museum “Pops-Up” at Kennett Square Juneteenth Celebration and Old Kennett Meeting

PUMU?! What on earth is a PUMU?

It's a name that Kennett Underground Railroad Center President John O'Neal used for the event and exhibition that KURC created last June 16: a Pop-up Museum. As



the rest of Kennett Square was enjoying a borough-wide celebration of Juneteenth, the board members and friends of KURC were creating a temporary museum in the basement of the New Garden UAME church on East Linden Street. We greatly appreciated the hospitality provided by Reverend Maxine Mayo and the other members of her congregation, especially Reverend Peggy DeShields.



“Juneteenth, also known as Juneteenth Independence Day or Freedom Day, is an American holiday that commemorates the June 19, 1865, announcement of the abolition of slavery in the U.S. state of Texas, and more generally the emancipation of enslaved African-Americans throughout the former Confederacy of the southern United States.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juneteenth>

Visitors were greeted by Board members in costume such as Michele Sullivan, shown left with her “friend,” Lucretia Mott, and John O’Neal talking with Chester County Heritage Preservation Coordinator Karen Marshall (below left). Anne-Louise Jeffrey, one of the most important leaders of the Kennett Square Juneteenth celebration, was of great



help to us as well.

Among the features of this exhibit were fifteen 18” x 24” placards with information about famous figures of the UGRR, such as Harriet Tubman and Thomas Garrett, and lesser-known heroes of this cause, such as 18th C. Quaker Jacob Lindley and African-American conductor James Walker of Kennett Square. Visitors looked over chains and irons, some genuine, some replicas, in which enslaved

Continued on p. 2



Continued from p. 1



people were shackled.

Another replica, which proved very popular, was of a wooden crate that, in 1855, Henry “Box” Brown, a freedom-seeker from Richmond, Virginia, had himself shipped to liberty in Philadelphia. There the crate was pried open by members of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, including William Still, the first historian of the UGRR. Young people visitors to the PUMU delighted in hopping into the crate and crouching down, imagining what a 26-hour trip in such confinement would be like.

In one corner historian and Board Member Chris Densmore, recently retired as curator of the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore, stood behind a table with a sign that read “Ask the Expert.” And a great many people did; Chris very busy



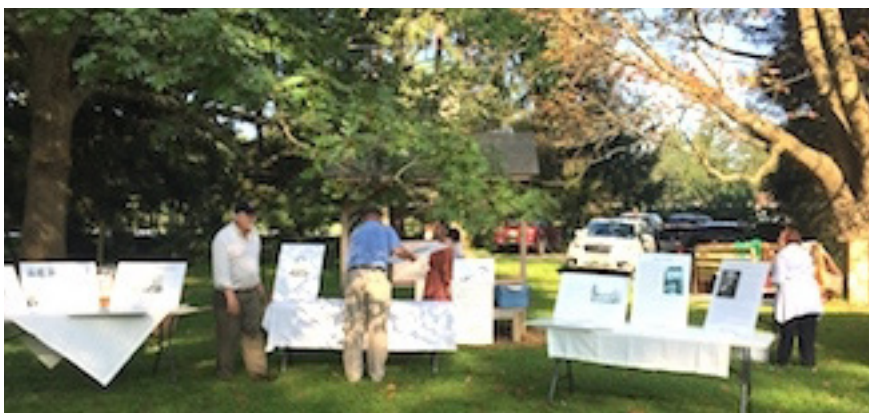
sharing his stories and explanations to a steady stream of visitors.

Visitors there were in abundance. Board member Mary Ellen Wilson greeted people and asked them to sign in, and she counted about 125 persons, ranging from youngsters of about 7-8 years to elders of ten times that age. The PUMU was intended to be three hours long, but a steady stream keep us going for another 45 minutes. As visitors left through a different door, Board member Darleen Amobi (*left*) handed out a good many pieces of free literature and also sold copies of books regarding the local UGRR.

Two days later we took down the exhibit, helped greatly by the strong young members of the Comanda family: Eliot, Jesse, Nora, and Bianca.

About ten weeks later, like the mushrooms for which Kennett Square is famous, the PUMU sprouted up at Old Kennett Meetinghouse just off Rt. 1. (*Below left*) That building, retired as a place of worship over a century ago, opens up for Meeting for Worship three times in the summer, the last First Days (Sundays) of the summer months.

With the help once again of Ann-Louise and Board members, the material was exhibited outside the little



building for several hours. (*See above*) About fifty people attended Meeting for Worship at 9:00 am. Meeting clerk Margaret Moore greeted people after the service, and afterward KURC Board members shared information with and answered questions to dozens of visitors to the pop-up museum. The weather was, for late August, unusually mild and suitable for outdoor activities, which included two tours of the Old Kennett cemetery and building by Kennett Friends Trustee Lars Farmer.

Board members and friends of the Kennett Underground Railroad Center are very pleased with the success of our “Pop-up Museum” experiences. We could only wish, however, for a true “center,” where our museum materials could be permanently displayed.

Perhaps someday...

Hadley Fund Teams with KURC to Sponsor Speaker Series for 2018-19

The Hadley Fund of Kennett Square (see below) and the Kennett Underground Railroad Center announce a joint effort to bring eminent scholars and authors from New England, Pennsylvania, and Delaware to this area for a series of eight lectures. All lectures will be free. They will occur once each month from November of this year through June, 2019. The organizing theme of this series:

“Enslaved, Freedom-Seeking, and Free: 19th C. African American Life in the Mid-Atlantic Region.”

The lectures will be held at 2:00 pm on Saturdays. Below is a tentative schedule for the speakers, dates (or at least the month), and topics of their presentations. Some sites of these presentations have yet to be finalized, but will be announced within the next few weeks in a separate program guide.

• **Bruce Mowday**--prolific author of books on Chester County. **November 3, 2018**
Site: Kendall at Longwood auditorium
Topic: “J. Howard Wert: Abolitionist & UGRR Agent”

• **Robin Krawitz**--professor at Delaware State; President of the UGRR Coalition of Delaware
December 8, 2018 **Topic: “19th C. Delaware Law for African Americans”**

• **Nancy Webster**--
Curator of Friends Historical Association
January 12, 2019
Topic: “The Geography of the UGRR”

• **Professor Tonya Thames-Taylor**--
West Chester University, **February 9, 2019**
Site: Church of the Open Door
Topic: “Faith and Law in Freedom-Seeking”

• **Kate Clifford Larson**--author of *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman--Portrait of an American Hero* **March 23, 2019**
Site: Kennett Friends Meeting
Topic: Harriet Tubman

Dr. Emma Lapsansky-Werner-- Professor Emeritus of Haverford College, **April, 2019**
Topic: “The Other Side: Feminism, Publishing, and Law in the 19th C. Abolitionist Struggle”

Denise Burgher--
Chair, Community and Church Outreach
The Colored Conventions Project, **May 4, 2019**
Topic: “Colored Conventions of the 19th C.”

Dr. Bradley Skelcher-- Professor Emeritus of Delaware State **June 8, 2019** **Topic: “African American Education in the 19th C.”**

HADLEY'S FOUNDING

Over 100 years ago, Charles C. Hadley created a gift that keeps on giving. In his will, Charles directed that earnings from the Theodore D. & Elizabeth A. Hadley Fund be used for the civic betterment, social welfare & education of the people of Kennett Square, PA and the surrounding country or whoever may care to avail themselves of an opportunity to learn and be entertained by a course of lectures and lighter attractions. Charles was clear that admission to Hadley events should be FREE.

HADLEY PROGRAMS HIGHLIGHT...

- + Progressive values including diversity, inclusion, civil rights & social justice
- + Arts, culture & history, to broaden horizons, honor creativity & provide context
- + Environmental health & sustainability

[quoted from the Hadley Fund website]

A Special Form of Resistance: the Colored Conventions of 19th C. Pennsylvania--by Michele Sullivan

Burgeoning Black Community in Philadelphia

When freedom seekers made their way north in the early 19th C., they likely anticipated being able to disappear into the Philadelphia's black community--and did. In 1820 12,000 blacks lived there. By 1850 those numbers swelled to 22,000. No other northern city had larger numbers. Freedom seekers may have heard that there were jobs in the city, and people who would help them get established. One imagines that many fugitives were grateful simply to be free and hopeful about their futures.

Some Leaders of the Black Community in Philadelphia and Nearby

Black churches had many well-known ministers who became leaders for the black population. They were people who attempted to influence the law and oppose discriminatory and racist practices. One of these activists was Richard Allen (*right*), who in 1816 established the Mother Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church; another was his friend Absalom Jones, who with Allen developed new churches for African Americans. James Forten (see p. 5), a wealthy sail maker, was a pillar of the black



community. In Chester County William Whipper, social activist, and Reverend Steven Smith, in the lumbering trade, co-established the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. Robert Purvis was raised in a wealthy family and financially supported many abolitionist causes. William

Still was an abolitionist and agent of the UGRR; significantly, he was a recorder of the information about many of the fugitives who made it north and passed through his office. As a result in 1872 he published *The Underground Railroad*, the very first book on this topic. Abraham Shadd, born in Wilmington, moved to West Chester and continued there to support abolition and the UGRR.

Overview of Selected Events in the History of Philadelphia

Between 1815 and 1860 Philadelphia manufacturing transitioned from goods made in small workshops to factory production. The city became the center of industrial production (textiles, metal fabrication, steam engines, among many others). However, during this

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.

Donate to KURC

Many of you receiving this publication have donated 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 below.

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time several depressions occurred (1816-1822; 1837, 1857). Work for anyone at the time was difficult: long hours, small pay, and often dangerous working conditions. Increased numbers of immigrants resulted in many African Americans being driven out of the trades. At one time, it is estimated that 20% of the black population begged on city streets.

In spite of significant challenges, black leaders mentioned above became visible to the white community, demonstrating competence and agency. Many whites felt threatened, expressing rage and a willingness to destroy black homes, property, meeting halls, and churches. During 1840-1850 race hostility grew.



In one example of the white backlash, the Pennsylvania legislature rescinded the right to the vote for blacks citizens. Several churches were destroyed. Mobs burned homes of black leaders.

Portrait of sailmaker James Forten, from the Pennsylvania Historical Society

Gangs roamed the city and pulled blacks from their homes and beat them. Newspapers carried racist pictures and articles.

Out of these extraordinarily challenging conditions, the Colored Convention Movement emerged.

About 1830 Richard Allen called for leaders in Philadelphia and other cities to come together for mutual support and social action. Other leaders mentioned above within the city and Chester County supported this meeting and became active in the Convention efforts. At their first meeting delegates included entrepreneurs, clerics, journalists, among others. The men first created the American Society for Free Persons of Color. Its goal initially was to establish a settlement in Canada. Other outcomes of the Colored Conventions included community-building among leaders; increasing the number of people who became active; sharing strategies to combat racism and discrimination; and increasing the numbers of black leaders to express what

they deserved and expected for all African Americans in the nation.

Convention delegates were eager to meet again. Plans were made for the next year. (Indeed, for many years, conventions followed in different states focusing on local, state and national issues.)

Moral Uplift

The Colored Conventions...

- A.) advocated temperance and developed a network of Temperance Societies.
- B.) encouraged blacks to find work, on farms, in homes, with tradesmen.
- C.) promoted literacy, encouraging the establishment of schools for general education and specialized training and literary societies.

Manisha Sinha, in her 2016 book *The Slave's Cause*, states that black abolitionists saw a linkage between "slavery, ignorance and vice," on the one hand; and "freedom, literacy and virtue," on the other (p. 302).

Political Efforts

The Colored Conventions...

- A.) expressed anger about discrimination in the North: in legal matters, sought protection from violence and equal access to public services.
- B.) worked towards being recognized as citizens.
- C.) lobbied for equal political rights and representation.
- D.) attempted to secure equal treatment in the courts and fair treatment by police.
- E.) encouraged ministers to inform congregations about coordinated activism.
- F.) addressed and opposed widespread belief in "negro" inferiority.

Many of these goals were worthy in themselves. They were also an effort to gain respect and credibility in the larger white community.

Conventions were more than talk. They intended to "spread the word." Minutes and articles were sent to newspapers, (white, especially *The Liberator*; and the black-created *Colored American*, among others). Flyers were printed to be hung in public places. Ministers included reports in their sermons. More people became aware that social action might make a difference.

This short article cannot do justice to these topics. For more information we encourage readers to look at the University of Delaware website. Here one will find a vast collection of digital records of all these conventions. In addition KURC is sponsoring a lecture series in which scholars working on the Colored Conventions will tell us more.