

Schedule for “Promise of Liberty” Student Recognition Ceremony
Friday, February 23 • 1:30-2:10
Middletown High School, Middletown, MD

Introduction	Kathleen Schlappal, Principal Middletown High School
Overview of “Promise of Liberty” Project	Dean Herrin, NPS Coordinator Catoclin Center for Regional Studies
Remarks	Allison Weese, Renzulli Resource Teacher Middletown Middle School
Remarks	Jenny Masur, Regional Coordinator, National Capitol Region, NPS, National UGRR Network to Freedom Program
Remarks	David Bahlman, Acting Director, Maryland Office of Tourism Development
Remarks	John Gartrell, Research Archivist, Study of the Legacy of Slavery, Maryland State Archives
Recognition of Students	

February 20, 2007

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Middletown Students' Research Uncovers African American History

Frederick, MD--Students at Middletown High School who participated in "The Promise of Liberty" project will be recognized for their research efforts at a 1:30 p.m. ceremony on Friday, Feb. 23 at the high school. The students' work, conducted last spring as eighth graders at Middletown Middle School, revealed new information about local African Americans in the Civil War era. Their research also identified an Underground Railroad site in Linganore that will be added to the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program.

The "Promise of Liberty" project was a cooperative effort between Middletown Middle School, the Catoctin Center for Regional Studies at Frederick Community College, the National Park Service, and the Maryland Room of the Frederick County Public Library. It was funded by a Save Our History grant from the History Channel.

Allison Weese's Renzulli class at Middletown Middle School used primary documents to research what life was like for local African Americans between 1855 and 1870. Using runaway slave ads in local newspapers, historic maps, enlistment papers, census records, court documents, and other sources, students examined slavery, the Underground Railroad, and sites from which African Americans escaped enslavement. They also researched locations connected with the enlistment of African American soldiers in the United States Colored Troops during the Civil War and sites of Freedmen's Bureau schools. These were established in the region to educate African American children following the war.

One of the project's goals was to help students realize the importance of preserving little-known or overlooked sites from the African American experience. The research results were plotted on a map, compiled into a guide to historic sites, and organized into a PowerPoint presentation. The project encouraged students to look at the places where history actually happened. Students had the opportunity to visit Tolson's Chapel in Sharpsburg, the site of a Freedmen's Bureau school.

One of the most significant results of the students' research revealed a local Underground Railroad site in the Linganore community. Several members of one family escaped enslavement in the 1850s from this location.

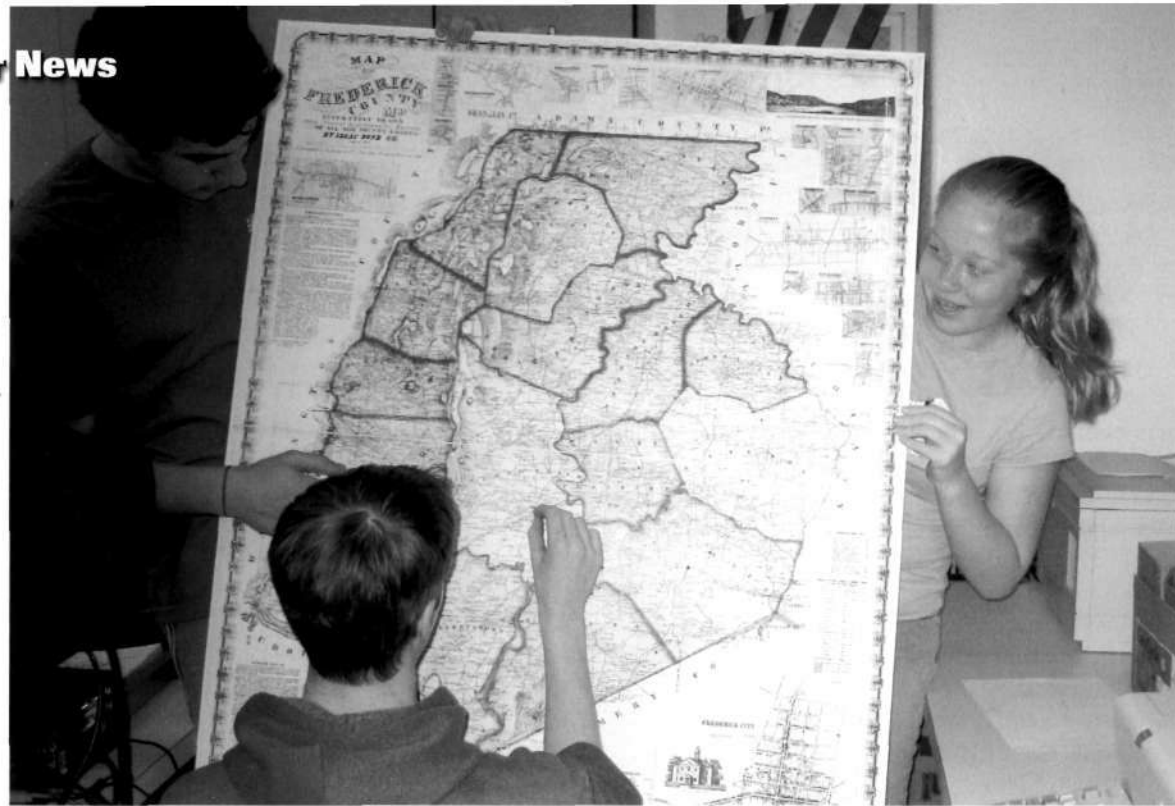
The students nominated the site to the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program. It was accepted and also will be included in the next edition of the Maryland Office of Tourism's map and guide to state Underground Railroad sites. The Network to Freedom documents sites connected to the journey of enslaved people seeking freedom, including sites from which they escaped.

The Catoctin Center was given a Partnership Award from the Maryland Office of Tourism at last November's state tourism conference for its support of students involved in the "Promise of Liberty" project.

The ceremony on February 23 is part of Middletown High School's celebration of Black History Month. Parents, community members, and Maryland tourism and National Park Service representatives will attend the ceremony.

The Catoctin Center for Regional Studies was created in 1998 by Frederick Community College and the National Park Service to promote the research and study of the history and culture of central Maryland and the adjacent areas of neighboring states.

For more information, contact Dean Herrin, National Park Service Coordinator of the Catoctin Center, at 301-624-2773.



Students Kevin Parker, Marco Cardin, and Rachel Burdette locate historic sites on an 1858 map of Frederick County.

(ANGELA COMMITO)

1858 map of Frederick County that served as a visual index.

For sites related to African American soldiers in the United States Colored Troops, students examined historical sources such as National Archives records documenting recruitment offices; enlistment records; and census information. These sources helped the students to locate the residences of soldiers who would distinguish themselves through service.

Freedmen's Bureau school sites were discovered by consulting maps, teachers' reports, school building records, and newspaper articles. The students were surprised to find that Frederick County had thirteen Freedmen's Bureau schools, scattered throughout the county.

The research results were compiled into a map and guide to historic sites and a PowerPoint presentation about the findings. The Promise of Liberty project also encouraged students to look at the places where history actually happened. In addition to their classroom research, the students visited Tolson's Chapel, a church that also served as a Freedmen's Bureau school in Sharpsburg, Maryland. The group toured the building and the adjoining cemetery and learned about the preservation efforts of the Save Historic Antietam Foundation.

The students learned how histories are constructed from careful research involving primary sources and critical thinking, and as a result, they learned to appreciate the difficulties historians face and the rewards of doing original research. The students had help from project staff to complete the materials and in the process they were asked to reflect on their work. In their words,

"Being a historian takes lots of work, time, and preparation," and "The locations and historical artifacts that are left are the only mementos of this time period," and "These sites are special because they represent our nation's past mistakes such as racial discrimination and segregation."

One of the major project goals was to impress students with the importance of preserving little-known or overlooked sites from the African American experience. To this end, students helped with the nomination of the Thornton Poole House in Linganore, Maryland, to the National Park Service's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program. The goal of the Network to Freedom Program is to promote activities and partnerships to commemorate the UGRR; to preserve sites and associated resources; and to educate the public about the historical significance of UGRR sites. Students learned about using historical evidence for verifying the authenticity of a possible UGRR site, and conducted preliminary investigations to help write the nomination. The Thornton Poole House is a significant site in the history of the regional Underground Railroad for the escape of twelve members of the enslaved Aldridge family over several years in the 1850s. William Still, the famous abolitionist and UGRR conductor, recorded their story as told by two family members and a friend upon arriving in Philadelphia in 1857. The Aldridge family's story expresses the motivations for escaping from slavery, particularly the fear of being sold away from one's family and loved ones.

Allison Weese, the students' teacher at Middletown Middle School who helped to coordinate



Emily Heuver and Margaret Markin display the worksheets team members used to record information from primary documents.

(ANGELA COMMITO)

the project, reflected that, "This project heightened students' awareness of the rich African-American history in our region and actively engaged students in the preservation of this regional history. As a result of this project, students became more skilled in working with primary documents and learned how to question and glean information from these sources. They also gained a wealth of information on the rewards and challenges of historic preservation." Projects like this one contribute to local history in significant ways by reaching youth – the historians of tomorrow – and professionals and community members looking to gain knowledge and a new perspective. John Howard of Antietam National Battlefield, who attended the students' public presentation of their work, found that, "The work produced by the Middletown students was of an outstanding quality. I am sure it will be a step that other local historians will build on for additional research." Dr. Carol W. Eaton, President of Frederick Community College, added, "Students involved in the Promise of Liberty Project became skilled in working with primary historical documents. They learned how to ask the sources questions and glean information from them. Students came away with a deeper understanding of complex elements of a pivotal era in our region's and nation's history. Their exploration of the variety of problems faced by African Americans in this time period and the diverse responses to these issues enabled them to appreciate the importance of preserving historic sites that tell such significant stories."

As a result of the students' effort, local historians have a significant body of data for investigat-

ing African American history of the region between 1850 and 1870. The Catoctin Center and partners now can draw on the newly identified and located historical sites as a basis for future efforts to preserve African American sites. Janet Davis, historic preservation specialist for Frederick County, stated that, "The Middletown Middle School students did a wonderful job on the project to identify and map sites in Frederick County related to slavery. The most gratifying effect of this project is the awakening of interest in historical research in these young people. I hope to see and work with them again in research projects as they progress through their education."

Catoctin Center staff members and interns from Frederick Community College have also gained valuable experience in working with students and teachers in the Frederick County Public School system. All these elements place the Catoctin Center in a better position than before to produce and distribute materials that encourage preservation to the general community. For more information about the project, contact the Catoctin Center for Regional Studies at 301-624-2773. Project information and copies of the historic site map and guide produced by the students will soon be downloadable from the Center's website at <<http://catoctincenter.frederick.edu/>>.

Teresa Moyer was the Catoctin Center's Project Leader for the "Promise of Liberty" Project, and is currently a graduate student in the American Studies Department of the University of Maryland.