

# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## PUBLIC MEETING ON UNDERGROUND RAILROAD JULY 1

Muscatine County anti-slavery activity, black history, emancipation also to be discussed

**MUSCATINE, Iowa** – The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission invites the public to a special presentation on groundbreaking research into Muscatine County's Underground Railroad, Black history, emancipation, and anti-slavery activity. The meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, July 1, in the third-floor meeting room of the Musser Public Library, located at 408 East 2nd Street, Muscatine.



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Project consultant Rebecca Lawin McCarley of SPARK Consulting (Cedar Rapids) will share highlights from a nine-month research effort supported by a Certified Local Government (CLG) grant from the Historic Preservation Fund of the National Park Service.

The Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission received a CLG grant from the Historic Preservation Fund of the National Park Service in spring 2024 to hire a consultant and spearhead this project to research Underground Railroad and anti-slavery activities in Muscatine and in Muscatine County. Several volunteers from throughout Muscatine County worked on research for the project, including members of the Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission.

The goal of the project was to research and document Underground Railroad activities and related themes such as anti-slavery activities, emancipation, and Black residents in Muscatine County, as well as identify places in the county connected with this history. The project began with information previously gathered through the Iowa Freedom Trail Project and by the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

While the role of white participants in helping freedom seekers escape from slavery has been highlighted historically, inclusion of the role of Black participants in the Underground Railroad who sought their own freedom by these means and who assisted others in reaching freedom has been the focus of research in recent years. The Black communities within towns in Indiana, Ohio, and other Eastern cities have been documented to have provided aid and assistance to freedom seekers.

A key focus of the project in Muscatine County was utilization of primary source documentation of activities related to the Underground Railroad, such as newspaper articles from the 19th century, letters and diaries from participants in these activities, and histories written by people

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involved in these activities. Sources dating to the early and middle of the 20th century are generally considered less accurate than these primary sources.

Several incidents were documented through this primary source research on residents in Muscatine County assisting freedom seekers, with the locations of these incidents identified. However, no extant buildings were identified as ongoing “stations” on the Underground Railroad in Muscatine or Muscatine County through this extensive research.



Another key focus of this project was research into the Black residents of Muscatine in the middle of the 19th century. Muscatine had the largest Black population in Iowa in 1850, including free Blacks and former slaves who had been emancipated. Several Black residents in Muscatine owned property and operated businesses in the 1850s. This existing community attracted additional free Blacks, former slaves, and freedom seekers in the 1850s and 1860s.

Census records were heavily utilized to identify Black residents in Muscatine and Muscatine County from 1850 to the 1880s, providing names for additional research into historic newspapers and other sources. Through this research, freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad who later resided in Muscatine County were identified, as well as a number of Black residents who were freed through activities during the Civil War.

The research for this project is documented in a comprehensive report that expands on the historical record and creates a single source for information on themes related to the

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Underground Railroad, antislavery, emancipation, and Black community in Muscatine and Muscatine County. The final report will be available online to the public in early August.

The project positions the Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission or other organizations to undertake applications for potential sites to be listed on the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. Locations of sites with or without an extant building related to the freedom seekers and people assisting freedom seekers may be listed under the Network to Freedom program, unlike listing on the National Register of Historic Places where an extant building is typically required.

Any resident interested in learning more about this project and the results is invited to attend the public meeting at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday, July 1, at Musser Public Library.