

## Commemorating the long road to freedom From page 2

who quietly and humbly spoke to the audience about how much he enjoyed the project.

The program continued with a powerful talk given by Professor Verdis Robinson who teaches History at MCC. His passion was electric as he spoke, "I am a descendent of slaves, as are most African Americans." He spoke of the lives of slaves, the oppression, the attempts to dehumanize and beat human beings into submission, into servitude. Robinson emphasized the need to "be the change you want to see in this world" and talked about how western New York became a center for social reform, social justice, and recognition of human rights. He explained that western NY became known as The Burned Over District, because of the passion for religious and social reform burning in so many individuals and organizations that came to be. He touched on the profound impacts that area activists Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman had in the abolition of slavery, and how Douglass spread the word of the injustice and oppression that was happening in the southern US.

In 1850, due to the overwhelming number of slaves that were escaping to freedom in the north, the US Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act. Basically, any slave who had come to the north and was a free person had now become a "fugitive slave" subject to prosecution and anyone assisting them was also subject to fines and prosecution. "The residents of Sodus Point decided to do something about the wrongs, the injustice," Robinson explained. With Sodus Point's access to Lake Ontario, it was the perfect location for human rights activists to assist in the final exit from the United States for the now fugitive slaves; their new home would be Canada, where they could be free.

Patty Parsons spoke about the story that the mural depicts, particularly about the schooner that is in the center of the mural. Captain George Garlock's freight schooner aptly named "Free Trader" ran between Sodus Point and Canada in the mid-1800's, taking iron ore and lumber across the lake, and if he spotted a small row boat with people in it out in the lake, he would pick them up and take them too. The fugitive slaves would be held in several safe houses in the Sodus Point area, which included the old Cohn Farm, the former Sodus Fruit Farm, what is currently the Maxwell Creek B&B, and Silver Waters B&B. As time goes on more former safe houses are being discovered.

Patty is the great granddaughter of Captain Garlock and shared that when she wanted to find out information about Sodus Point's role in the Underground Railroad, "I did what I always do...I asked my mother (Elsie Parsons). I said to mom, 'do you know about the Underground Railroad in Sodus Point?' Mom replied, 'of course I do' and she began to relate the stories that had been passed down from her mother and grandmother."

There was also a tunnel between the current Silver Waters B&B which ran down John Street to the lakeshore, which Bill Huff's highway department crew discovered decades ago. Bill related "I knew this was something big when the crew said they found something unusual while digging and we found this tunnel that was about four feet wide and three feet high." Bill also talked about finding a secret room at Silver Waters, a hiding place for slaves on their journey.

Many descendants of Captain Garlock attended the dedication: From Sodus Point - grandchildren Elsie Parsons and George Arney; great grandchildren JoEllen and Chris Arney; great great grandnephew Mike Garlock; great great granddaughter Mary Garlock-Wilberg and her son Hugo from Massachusetts; great great granddaughter Sarah Tink from New Jersey; granddaughter Bessie Briggs Schnabel and her daughter Dale Birch from Manchester; greatgrandson Larry Briggs from Newark; great granddaughter Barbara Oakfield Bush and her son Roger Bush from Manchester; and great great granddaughter Colleen Dox Griffith from Manchester.

The dedication concluded with the singing of *Amazing Grace* by Dixie Caston and Susan Wheeler from the Alton Gospel Tabernacle. Bruce Farrington noted that the author of the song, John Newton, had been the captain of a slave ship in the late 1700's. His ship transported hundreds of people from Africa into bondage as slaves in England and elsewhere. His conversion to Christianity was a turning point in his life, reflected in the words of the famous song.

For more information about the rich history of Sodus Point, or if you're interested in becoming a "History Detective" visit [www.historicsoduspoint.com](http://www.historicsoduspoint.com).

*There's a little bit of heaven in that muddy road to freedom.*

*Follow the drinking gourd.*

*Keep on a-travelin' that mighty road to freedom.*

*Step by step, keep a-travelin' on.*