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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 28, 2021

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Nineteenth Century Abolition & Underground Railroad Webinar Series
Sponsored by the Tug Hill Commission

Watertown, NY – Learn more about the abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad in Tug Hill and the North Country by joining the Tug Hill Commission for a new historical three-part webinar series. Several 19th century abolitionists with land on Tug Hill and the North Country worked to free enslaved people by providing them safe passage north, fighting for their legal rights, and offering them land to till. The North Country was an important part of the trek north on the Underground Railroad with several sites serving as stations for rest and safety. In the first half of the 19th century a settlement was created to provide land to formerly enslaved people so that they could own land and, ideally, gain the right to vote as landowners. Much of this history is hidden in archives and on the land itself.

Based on the popularity of the *Constable Chronicles* and *Letters from a Tug Hill Logger* webinar series, the commission has continued to reach out to partners to highlight unique regional history. Anyone interested in local history, from historians, local leaders, Tug Hill residents and those with Tug Hill ties that have moved away can join from the comfort of their own homes. Individual registration links are provided below and can also be found at tughill.org/upcoming-workshops/.

On May 20, several experts will present information on the Florence Settlement, part of 17,000 acres deeded to Irish and Black settlers by abolitionist Gerrit Smith, in what is now the Florence Hill State Forest in the town of Florence, Oneida County. Research from archeological digs, archival searches, and more will be presented along with video clips of the site as it is today. The Florence Settlement is part of Black history on Tug Hill, and the panelists have been involved in efforts to uncover that history and elevate its stories. Jessica Harney is a teacher at the Camden Central School District. Matthew Kirk is a Principal Investigator and Vice President of Hartgen Archeological Associates, Inc. Charles “Chuck” Vandrei is an Agency Historic Preservation Officer and Archaeologist with the Division of Lands and Forests of the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. Read more about their work before the webinar in this article, [Camden High School, DEC dig freed slave settlement in Florence | Rome Daily Sentinel \(romesentinel.com\)](https://www.romesentinel.com/story/news/local/2021/05/18/camden-high-school-dec-dig-freed-slave-settlement-in-florence/7444440002/).

Register for *The Rise & Fall of the Florence Settlement* (May 20, 2021 07:00 PM) at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_5olb1_c2RbuG7ZvqI2cwKQ.

On June 10, the North Country Underground Historical Association will share some of its wealth of knowledge about routes taken through the North Country to freedom in the 19th and 20th centuries. The routes, the reality and laws that consequently created them, and the people who both “built” it and used it to find freedom will be discussed. The session will be led by Jacqueline “Jackie” Madison, the President of the North Country Underground Historical Association. You can learn more about the North Country Underground Historical Association prior to the presentation on their website [North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association - Home](http://NorthCountryUndergroundRailroadHistoricalAssociation.com).

Register for ***The Underground Railroad: Routes Through the North Country*** (June 10, 2021 07:00 PM) at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_4G3FP-cySPKFV2ebQpvUpg.

And lastly, on June 24, Underground Railroad research being conducted currently by the Oneida County Freedom Trail Commission led by Judith Wellman, Historian, and her team Jan DeAmicis, Mary Hayes Gordon, and Deirdre Sinnott will be shared. These researchers will provide an overview of their current survey of Underground Railroad sites, abolition, and African American life in Oneida County while tying in their current work to answer key questions in their research: Did the Underground Railroad have tunnels? Was the Underground Railroad a secret movement? Did everyone who left slavery on the Underground Railroad go to Canada? Did only people of European descent keep stations on the Underground Railroad? Did only men travel and work on the Underground Railroad? The panelists will also highlight important women on the Underground Railroad.

Register for ***A Well-perfected Organization: The Underground Railroad in Oneida County, NY*** (June 24, 2021 07:00 PM) at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_9zILHGAqSxu5W-KoE1ubZQ.

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The New York State Tug Hill Commission is a non-regulatory state agency charged with helping local governments, organizations, and citizens shape the future of the region, especially its environment and economy. The commission uses a grassroots approach to build local capacity and provide technical assistance in land use planning, community development, and natural resource management.