

NEWS RELEASE

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Adkins Arboretum Receives Network to Freedom Grant to Develop Underground Railroad Interpretive Experience

Adkins Arboretum has been awarded a National Park Service National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom (NTF) grant to develop and produce a self-guided virtual tour and interpretive storytelling experience. The project will increase the awareness of the link between nature and the Underground Railroad and will highlight ways the environment helped and hindered those who resisted enslavement through their flight to freedom. It will debut this fall.



Anthony Cohen

Through a combination of video, articles, audio clips, historical photos and resource links, the NTF project will complement and build upon the Arboretum's existing *A Journey Begins: Nature's Role in the Flight to Freedom* audio tour. Visitors—both onsite and online—will be invited to explore a landscape that has been shaped by and still bears witness to history. Through accounts of freedom seekers intuiting the environment while pursuing a path out of bondage, visitors will learn how freedom seekers' methods for hiding, communication, navigation and finding nourishment reveal a deep connection to and understanding of the landscape. They will also be encouraged to explore these accounts further, to learn more about the plant and animal species mentioned and to visit related NTF sites to continue their own journey of discovery.

Visitors will travel through the Arboretum with Anthony Cohen, a historian, author and explorer of the American past. As founder and president of The Menare Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to the preservation of Underground Railroad history, Cohen creates vibrant educational programs and works with individuals, organizations and communities to use history as a spark for human potential. In addition to operating Button Farm Living History Center in Germantown, Md., he has served as a consultant to the National Parks Conservation Association, Maryland Public Television and NASA, among others, and he trained Oprah Winfrey for her role as Sethe in the 1998 motion picture based on Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*. Along with current Adkins trustee Damika Baker-Wilson and historian Kate Clifford Larson, Cohen was instrumental in developing the Arboretum's Underground Railroad programming.

The Arboretum has contracted with Schoolhouse Farmhouse to produce the guided experience. Based in Cordova, Schoolhouse Farmhouse focuses on projects that explore nature and humans' relationship with the environment. The principals, George Burroughs and Lauren Giordano, have partnered previously with the Arboretum on a series of field guides and other education resources.

The National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom was established in 1998. Its mission, through collaboration with local, state and federal entities, as well as individuals and organizations, is to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues to inspire people worldwide. Through its mission, the NTF helps to advance the idea that all human beings embrace the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression. The program consists of sites with a verifiable connection to the Underground Railroad, educational and interpretive programs that pertain to the Underground Railroad and facilities, either research, educational or interpretive. The network currently comprises more than 680 locations in 39 states, Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Adkins Arboretum is a 400-acre native garden and preserve at the headwaters of the Tuckahoe Creek in Caroline County. For more information, visit adkinsarboretum.org or call 410-634-2847, ext. 0.

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