

NEWS RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Jodie Littleton
Communications Consultant
jlittleton@adkinsarboretum.org



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Adkins Arboretum Audio Essay Podcast Explores Nature and the Underground Railroad

Adkins Arboretum is pleased to announce the release of the *Rooted Wisdom* Audio Essay, the latest addition to the *Rooted Wisdom* initiative. Recorded at the Arboretum and featuring filmmaker Mecca Lewis and historian Anthony Cohen, the production explores the Underground Railroad and reveals how sometimes what's before us is the past.

Rooted Wisdom examines how self-liberators used their knowledge of the natural world as they forged a path to freedom on the Underground Railroad. It comprises a guided experience, the heart of which is a beautifully filmed and narrated documentary, *Rooted Wisdom: Nature's Role in the*

Underground Railroad, in which Cohen guides viewers through the Adkins Arboretum landscape and reveals freedom seekers' methods for navigation, concealment, evasion and nourishment. The project also includes a companion website, rootedwisdom.org, that presents the film in five chapters and invites a deeper understanding of the relationship between self-liberation and nature through detailed accounts, related historical sites and resources relating to the landscape both then and now. The film and virtual companion premiered in 2022.



Filmmaker Mecca Lewis and historian Anthony Cohen record the recent *Rooted Wisdom* Audio Essay at Adkins Arboretum. Available at rootedwisdom.org, the audio essay explores the Underground Railroad, the unending process of pursuing and interpreting history and how a cultural knowledge of nature played a key role in the planning and process of self-liberation. Photo courtesy of Schoolhouse Farmhouse.

In the new audio essay, Lewis and Cohen discuss the Underground Railroad, the unending process of pursuing and interpreting history and how a cultural knowledge of nature factored into the planning and process of self-liberation, all while walking the Arboretum grounds. The guided experience and audio essay are available at rootedwisdom.org. To ensure ongoing community engagement, the Arboretum has partnered with Beech Works, Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to broadening public discourse and advancing public education on social issues through thought-provoking documentary and narrative films, to advance the rootedwisdom.org web presence, offer a 26-minute version of the film for community screenings and develop additional programming for audiences beyond the Arboretum. Additional resources at the Arboretum, including information about school field trips and docent-led guided walks, can be found at adkinsarboretum.org.

Mecca Lewis is a Baltimore-based documentary filmmaker and a lover of experiential research and play. Her works include *Florence's Flowers*, an expeditious search for the echoes of once-resonant voices in the formerly vibrant radical abolitionist utopian society of Florence, Mass., and *Perspectives from "Nowhere,"* collage excerpts of visual and auditory landscapes of West Baltimore with community voices both past and present to detail the ongoing stories of history about the people of the Westside and the Highway to Nowhere.

Anthony Cohen is a historian, author and explorer of the American past. In 1996, he traveled 1,200 miles of Underground Railroad history from Maryland to Ohio, tracing the steps of freedom seekers along wilderness trails and waterways and stopping in towns along the way to chronicle their stories through artifacts, documents and oral accounts. He embarked on a second trip, from Alabama to Ontario, in 1998 and in 2015 followed the route of a great-great-granduncle who fled slavery in Savannah, Ga., in 1849 for freedom in Canada. He is founder and president of The Menare Foundation, Inc., a national nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the history of the Underground Railroad, and operates the Button Farm Living History Center, a 40-acre farm that depicts 1850s plantation life in Maryland. He has served as a consultant to the National Parks Conservation Association, Maryland Public Television and NASA, among others.

The audio essay is a coproduction of Adkins Arboretum and Schoolhouse Farmhouse. It was written by Mecca Lewis, Lauren Giordano and George Burroughs and was produced, recorded, edited and mixed by Giordano and Burroughs. It is based on work made possible by a grant from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, funded by the 400 Years of African American History Commission, and was financed in part by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority.

A 400-acre native garden and preserve, Adkins Arboretum provides exceptional experiences in nature to promote environmental stewardship.

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Adkins Arboretum 12610 Eveland Road Ridgely, MD 21620
410.634.2847 adkinsarboretum.org info@adkinsarboretum.org