

My name is Greg Roberts. I submit the following as testimony in favor of House Bill 340 designating the month of September as International Underground Railroad month.

I am currently the Village Administrator for the Village of New Richmond, Ohio. I am a proud graduate of the Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where I had the privilege of studying Ohio History under the late Dr. Philip Shriver. My hometown of New Richmond has a rich history of Underground Railroad activity as a hotbed of abolitionism prior to the Civil War. As a local historian and village administrator, I have seen the advantages of celebrating and commemorating this history as one of several tools to enhance economic development by promoting heritage tourism. I have assisted in the creation of the Clermont County Freedom Trail with the Clermont County Convention and Visitor's Bureau. I am a founder of the Ohio River National Freedom Corridor with colleagues in Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana seeking to link communities with Underground Railroad history beyond political borders. The Clermont County Freedom Trail features 20 Underground Railroad sites recognized by the National Park Service Network to Freedom Program (NTF). Our collective stories of the Underground Railroad in Ohio, as part of the larger quest for freedom and justice for all peoples, has international appeal.

The State of Ohio during the mid-1800's, played an integral role in helping enslaved "freedom seekers" obtain their freedom. The term "Underground Railroad" was actually coined in Ohio when Tice Davis swam across the Ohio River chased by slave catchers who stated once he reached the Ohio shore it was as if Davis had disappeared "on an Underground Railroad". The term "freedom seeker" more appropriately describes the courageous individuals who decided to self-emancipate who were much more than "passengers" on a metaphorical "railroad". The map below indicates the pre-eminence of Ohio as a major route for the Underground Railroad.



Scholars across the country working independently as well as with the National Park Service Network to Freedom Program, have been revealing incredible local stories of the Underground Railroad. These stories paint an inspiring picture of diverse cooperation between unlikely groups determined to right a

wrong or simply to help another fellow human being achieve their God-given right to be free. Commemorating this history celebrates that effort and provides examples that with hope and determination this country will continue to work together in order to form “a more perfect union.”

Beyond the big picture justification for recognizing the importance of the Underground Railroad through measures such as House Bill 340, there are many other reasons for Ohio to participate in promotion of this particular aspect of our history. Diane Miller, Director of the National Park Service Network to Freedom Program lists the following actions to compliment designation of September as International Underground Railroad Month:

- Develop trip suggestions/tourism opportunities to promote UGRR sites in Ohio that will be posted on the NTF website.
- Develop programs--either on site or virtually--to promote and commemorate the UGRR.
- Identify NTF members that are open to the public and would like to participate in NTF passport program.
- Participate in social media campaign for International UGRR Month.
- Identify and share web-based content (video, virtual tours. etc.) that explores UGRR content in Ohio to be included on NTF website.
- Identify and research the UGRR stories in Ohio communities. The UGRR was mostly a secret network. There are many untold stories waiting to be discovered and told. The National Park Service Network to Freedom Program provides resources to assist local researchers. Interested researchers can contact the NTF regional coordinators to discuss future inclusion in the NTF.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of HB 340.