

Sarah Richardt – Executive Director - Kelton House Museum and Garden

Awareness months are an important tool to highlight cultural, historic and health topics. Although the underground railroad is a known subject taught in schools, it is highly misunderstood. The passing of HB 340 will spotlight the history and historic sites in the state of Ohio that teach about the Underground Railroad along with the stories of the freedom seekers and abolitionists.

Fernando and Sophia Kelton were abolitionists in Columbus, OH. Their home, built in 1852, is just one mile from where we currently stand. In 1976, the Kelton House was donated to the Columbus Foundation by their granddaughter Grace Kelton and is run by the Junior League of Columbus as a museum focusing on decorative arts and the Local history. Although it is difficult to privately raise money to preserve this rich history, the Junior League of Columbus has and continues to raise money to preserve this important story and the site in which the story lies. The Kelton House Underground Railroad Learning Station was created in 2002 and since then has taught approximately 4000 students per year about the Underground Railroad (in non-covid years). But still, people in Columbus do not know about the history here of the Underground railroad. They do not know about the Kelton's contribution and most importantly they do not know the story of Martha and Pearl Hartway's journey from a plantation in Virginia to find freedom. They left that plantation at the young ages of 10 and 14 and we are honored to tell that story every day. Martha not only traveled along the Underground Railroad, she then stayed with the Kelton for over a decade, living with the Keltons as one of their own children, even marrying in the front parlor at 586 E. Town St. officiated by Reverend Poindexter.

Designating September as *International Underground Railroad Month* is a powerful step to call attention to this point in history that brings together people of multiple religions, race, and heritage in order to right an injustice. Unfortunately, underground railroad sites are lost, history is lost and the stories of the freedom seekers are lost. But, The simple 25 words of HB 340 has the power to capture the attention of the state, even for just 30 days, to continue the stories told by Frederick Douglass, Wibur Siebert, Booker T. Washington and Levi Coffin.

The Junior League of Columbus and the Kelton House Museum and garden has actively told the story of the Keltons and Hartways for 45 years. We will continue our commitment to preserve and educate about the underground railroad and now we need your help in passing HB 340.

Thank you for your time and attention today and please consider this an invitation to visit the Kelton House Museum and Garden.