

# BELMONT NEWS

HISTORIC BELMONT MANSION, WEST FAIRMOUNT PARK, PHILADELPHIA, PA



## GREETINGS FROM PRESIDENT, AUDREY JOHNSON THORNTON

On July 4, 2007 the American Women's Heritage Society held a public ceremonial opening for the Underground Railroad Museum at Belmont Mansion. This grand event marked the completion of a \$3 million dollar restoration of the Revolutionary Era Mansion and the beginning of Philadelphia's newest Underground Railroad Museum. Few of you know that Belmont Mansion is the first Palladian structure in the colonies and a fine example of the English suburban villa. Scholars have noted that its fine ornate Palladian style ceiling displays sophistication unmatched by any building that existed in American architecture at that time. The restoration of Belmont Mansion was an act of love that carried our membership over the span of more than twenty years.

We are proud and excited by new research that connects Belmont Mansion to Underground Railroad history. As most of you know, Belmont Mansion was built in 1684 by William Peters, a loyalist to England, who fled back to England just before the Revolu-

tionary war leaving Belmont to his wife and family. His son, Judge Richard Peters, a patriot and George Washington's Secretary of War is not only a Revolutionary hero but also an abolitionist who became the first non-Quaker member of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolishment of Slavery. His son, Richard Peters, Jr. became a Supreme Court Clerk and the first non-Quaker President of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery. Both Richard Peters and his son actively fought against slavery, including petitioning the Federal government and the courts to withdraw Fugitive Slave Laws. They were also the legal advisors to James Forten and Absalom Jones. We also discovered a young African woman named Cornelia Wells and her daughter Jane were purchased by Judge Peters. She served a three-year indenture then was completely freed and relocated to live at the Boelson House in Fairmount Park. "The Crown Jewel of Fairmount Park", which I published in 1984, documents over 300 years of history at Belmont Mansion.

The Underground Railroad Legacy Series was created to explore issues of slavery and freedom, abolition and the Underground Railroad. I invite you to visit the Underground Railroad Museum, experience our new exhibitions, and explore the architectural restoration of the mansion. Already school groups and individuals pass through our doors daily. Preservation and interpretation of this legacy is more important than ever, as our streets and youth have become more violent than we could ever imagine possible.

I extend special thanks to Mayor Michael Nutter and former Mayor, John Street for their unwavering support of our efforts to maintain and preserve this most important piece of Philadelphia and American history. Thanks also to the many women's organizations and sororities who have met here and supported our efforts for many years. They have been like the freedom fighters of the past, people who worked with courage, cooperation, and perseverance.

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**UNDERGROUND RAILROAD LEGACY SERIES**



Front exterior of Belmont Mansion.

The Underground Railroad Legacy Series is presented by the

American Women's Heritage Society Underground Railroad Museum at Historic Belmont Mansion in Fairmount Park with generous funding from the Institute for Museum and Library Services and other funding sources.

The Underground Railroad Legacy Series explores issues of slavery and freedom, and Underground Railroad history. This series of lectures and public conversations seek to preserve and interpret the legacy of courage, determination, and persever-

ance as exemplified by the enslaved who freed themselves and those who helped others become free.

It preserves the memory and deeds of freedom fighters such as **Harriet Tubman, William and Ellen Craft, Henry Box Brown, William Still, Judge Richard Peters** and his son **Richard Peters, Jr., Frederick Douglass, Lucretia Mott, William Lloyd Garrison** and many other people and places too numerous to list here.

**FEBRUARY 2008**

**QUEST FOR FREEDOM WORKSHOPS Slavery Workshop** with Gwen Ragsdale, The Ragsdale Slavery Collection. Objects from "Lest We Forget" The Black Holocaust Traveling Museum. **February 3, 1–2:00 pm. Admission: \$ 7 . 0 0**

**BOOK SIGNING**—Black Journalists at the Dawn of the 21st Century.

Wayne Dawkins presents his books "Rugged Waters: Black Journalists Swim the Mainstream" and "Black Voices in Commentary: The Trotter Group". **February 9, 1–2:00 pm. Admission: \$ 7 . 0 0**

**GALLERY TALK**—The Underground Railroad Museum at Belmont Mansion (Part I). Discover Belmont's Abolition and

Underground railroad History. **February 16, 1–2:00 pm. Admission: \$ 7 . 0 0**

**WORKSHOP**—Slavery and Underground Railroad Research at the National Archives. Learn how to explore and conduct research. **February 23, 1–2:00 pm. FREE**

*"Funding for the Underground Railroad Legacy Series is made possible with the generous support of the Institute for Museum and Library Services, Pennsylvania Humanities Council and other funders."*

**MARCH 2008**

**SLAVERY AND THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD**—Presenter: Professor Molefi Asante. **March 8, 1–2:00 pm. Admission: \$ 7 . 0 0**

**GALLERY TALK**—Women

Making History in the City of Philadelphia: The Crown Jewel of Fairmount Park (Part II). Discover women who are making a difference. **March 15, 1–2:00 pm. Admission: \$ 7 . 0 0**

**QUEST FOR FREEDOM**—Quilt Workshop and Quilt Exhibit Tour. **March 29, 1–3:00 pm. Admission: \$ 7 . 0 0**



Front of ground-level porch of Belmont Mansion

**UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MUSEUM  
EXHIBITS**



The Belmont Mansion's Underground Railroad Museum presents **The Legacy of Belmont**, which is a permanent exhibi-

tion at the Museum. It can be viewed every **Tuesday—Sunday, 12:00 PM—5:00 PM.**

**Otis McCollum's** cultural-historical exhibit "**Middle Passage...And Beyond**" is on loan to the Underground Railroad Museum.

**The American Women's Heritage Society, Inc** Celebrates 21 Years of Struggle/Accomplishments "The Long Journey to Historic Preservation at Historic Belmont Mansion" with the Grand Opening of the Underground Railroad Permanent Exhibit.

**NEWS & EVENTS**



To celebrate the opening of the **Underground Railroad Museum**, AWHs held a private pre-public opening reception on July 3, 2007 as well as the public opening on July 4, 2007.

**American Women's Heritage Society** and the School District of Philadelphia joined in a partnership for the purpose of

"Enriching the lives of students". The Belmont Mansion Museum officially adopts the High School of the Future to forge a living connection ***From the Past to the Future.***

**Belmont Mansion** was the venue for the presentation of "**Sanctuary**". "Sanctuary" is a living history program of the Civil War and Underground Railroad Museum.

**AWHS** hosted an evening of food, friends, and philanthropy in October at the Belmont Mansion.

**Underground Railroad Legacy Series** featured a Conversation with Carl Westmoreland on "Slavery and Preservation of Historic Underground Railroad Sites".

**10th anniversary**, Women's History Month Celebrates "Women Movers & Shakers", Sunday March 9, 2008—PECO Building.

**Sojourner Truth** will become the First Black Woman Honored with a Bust in the U.S. Capitol in October of 2008.

*"The American Women's heritage Society continues its legacy of uncovering and preserving the history of A Community—A City—A Nation"*

**FAIRMOUNT PARK COMMISSION APPROVES LONG-TERM LEASE**

The Fairmount Park Commission and City Council approved the first long-term lease with the American Women's Heritage Society on October 17, 2007. The 10-year (with

an option to renew every 10 years) lease was granted to the American Women's Heritage Society for the society's continued care of the historical Belmont Mansion. The Belmont Mansion,

which the American Women's heritage Society has been maintaining for 20-years, is the newly renovated home of the Underground Railroad Museum.



**C O N G R A T U L A T I O N S**



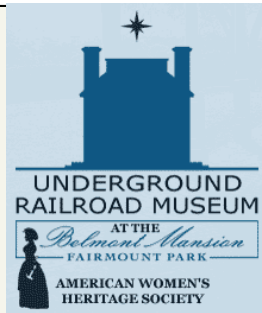
Audrey Johnson-Thornton, President of American Women's Heritage Society, was invited and became a member of the Forum of Executive Women in January.

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Ms. Johnson-Thornton also became a fully vested member in the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

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The Philadelphia Tribune Newspaper celebrated the Influential Leaders in Philadelphia on February 13, 2008. One of the recipients is Audrey Johnson Thornton, President American Women's Heritage Society/Underground Railroad Museum.



## THE AMERICAN WOMEN'S HERITAGE SOCIETY, INC UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MUSEUM

### MISSION STATEMENT

The American Women's Heritage Society is a non-profit organization founded in 1986 for the purpose of maintaining and preserving Belmont Mansion. In addition to preserving and interpreting Belmont Mansion as an historic site, AWHS seeks to build bridges of communication and interaction among the various ethnic communities in Philadelphia. Belmont Mansion is designated as a significant historic site of the Fairmount Park Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places. Through the site, AWHS has made a tremendous investment in documenting a more inclusive history of the Belmont Mansion and its ties to the Underground Railroad.

### Officers

Audrey R. Johnson Thornton, President  
Dr. Naomi J. Booker, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President  
Carole I Smith, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President  
Paulette O'Neill, 3<sup>rd</sup> Vice President  
Gayle Dickerson, Recording Secretary  
Mollie D. Robinson, Corresponding Secretary  
Linda B. Watson, Treasurer  
Keya Perry, Financial Secretary  
Joan Howell, Parliamentarian

American Women's Heritage Society  
Underground Railroad Museum  
Historic Belmont Mansion  
2000 Belmont Mansion Drive  
Philadelphia, PA 19131

VISIT OUR WEB SITE AT  
[WWW.BELMONTMANSION.ORG](http://WWW.BELMONTMANSION.ORG)