



Newsletter 3 May, 1997

Workshop 2 Results

The second workshop was again a success, as over eighty people attended representing 23 of the 35 cities and towns in the study area. The intent of this workshop was to present the results of an on-going inventory of the resources in the study area and to solicit comments on a proposed set of "interpretive themes," which are a way of telling the Freedom's Way "story."

Based on the results of the inventory, the following observations can be made:

- **The Freedom's Way includes historic and cultural resources which are of national importance.** The significance of many of these resources has been recognized, and there is an impressive network of town agencies, local historical societies, and state and federal agencies devoted to their preservation.
- **The Freedom's Way area's natural resources** include two national wildlife areas, a National Historic park, state parks and forests across the region, two major river valleys, farmlands throughout the area, and many private open lands. Again, the value of these resources is well recognized, and there is much grassroots support for their protection.
- **The Freedom's Way area has maintained its overall integrity:** four centuries of history are preserved here, and in the town centers and farmlands we have a capsule history of the development of the New England landscape. But many of these natural resources, especially those in private hands, are threatened, and the unique character of the landscape is endangered by development. The protection and presentation of the area's historic and cultural heritage lacks coordination: many resources are unprotected and need to be more widely presented, and the connections between different aspects of the region's history have not been brought out.

The interpretive themes were the subject of an open discussion at the second workshop, and many participants wrote out comments which they left with us after the workshop or mailed to us later. There were some suggestions that the study has taken on too much, and that it might be preferable to limit the scope of the study (to the Landscape of Democracy for example). But most people seemed to be comfortable with the themes proposed. Some suggested small improvements or changes in emphasis.

Also under discussion was the shape of the area: where should we draw the boundary? Should the area be smaller? Participants in the workshop were invited to comment on the boundary on copies of the study area map, which were handed out. A few towns were suggested for inclusion in the study area (Carlisle and Wayland especially) but most people suggested that the size of the area be reduced in one way or another.

A revised version of the theme statement is included in brief form in this newsletter, and a map of the area has been prepared that shows the distribution of thematically related resources.

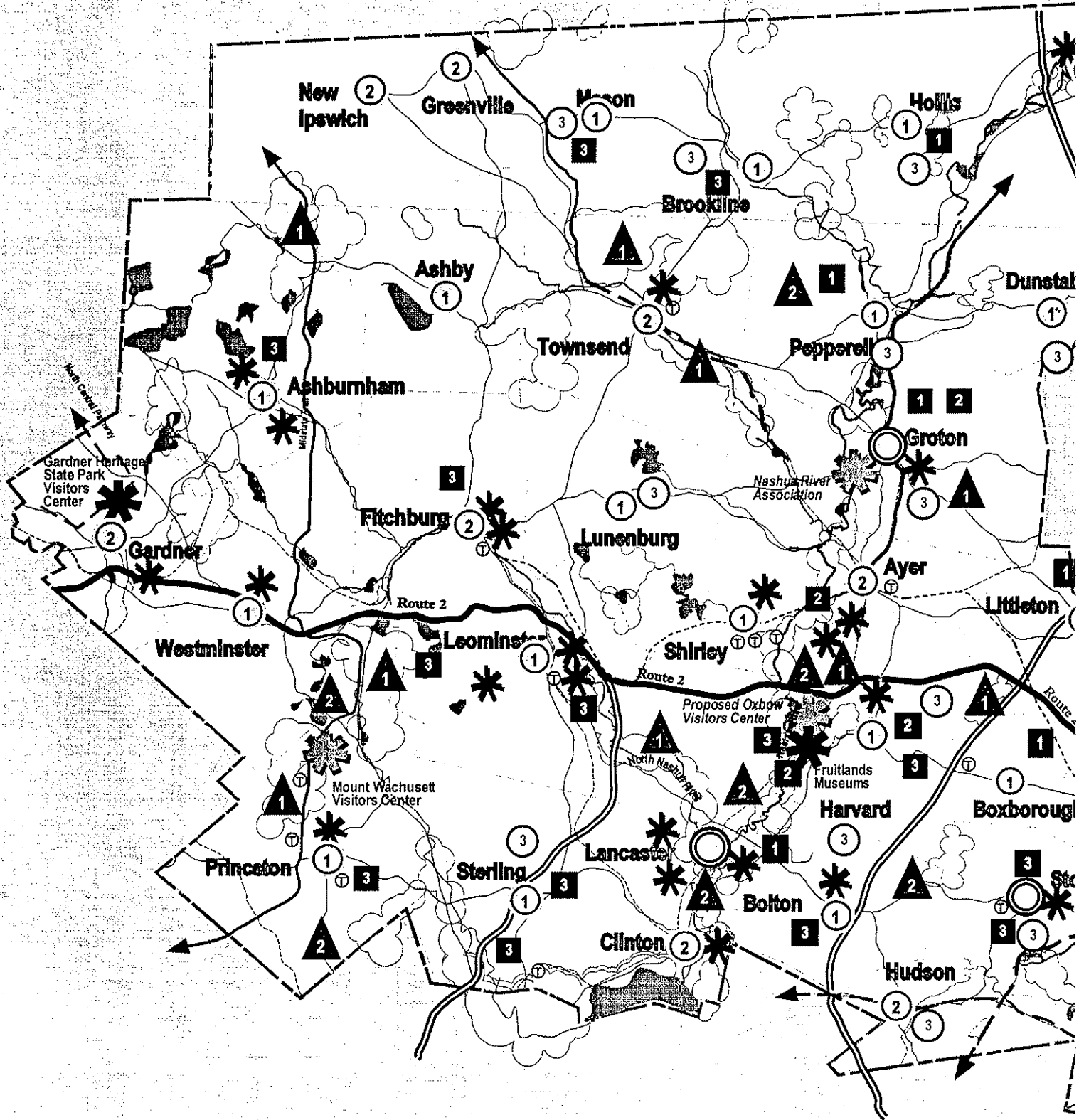
Freedom's Way Heritage Association Steering Committee

The Members of the Steering Committee include:

Freedom's Way Association
Mildred Chandler
Marge Darby
Robert Farwell
Mass. Department of Environmental Management
James Baecker
African American/Nipmuc History
Elizabeth Tennessee
Metropolitan Area Planning Council/
Minuteman Advisory Group
Judith Alland
Minuteman Historical Societies
George Krusen
Montachusett Regional Planning Commission
George Kahale
Nashoba Valley Chamber of Commerce
Deborah La Pointe
Nashua River Watershed Association
Robert Levite
Museum of Our National Heritage
Thomas Leavitt
Mass. Historical Commission
Judith McDonough
National Park Service
Nancy Nelson
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Janet Kennedy

Consultants:
ICON architecture, inc.
Jonathan Lane, Principal-in-Charge
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For more information or to be placed on the feasibility study mailing list please contact: Mildred Chandler or Marge Darby at the Freedom's Way Heritage Association 43 Buena Vista Street, MA 01433; Tel: (508) 772-3654



The Native Landscape

- 1** The Original Land
- 2** The Native American Landscape (Settlement, Agriculture, Trails)

Inventing the New England Landscape

- 1** Original Settlement Areas
- 1** Other Colonial and Early Federalist Settlements
- 2** Key Industrial and Transportation Centers

Landscape

- 1** Revolutionary
- 2** Religious
- 3** Social Ideology (Abolitionists)

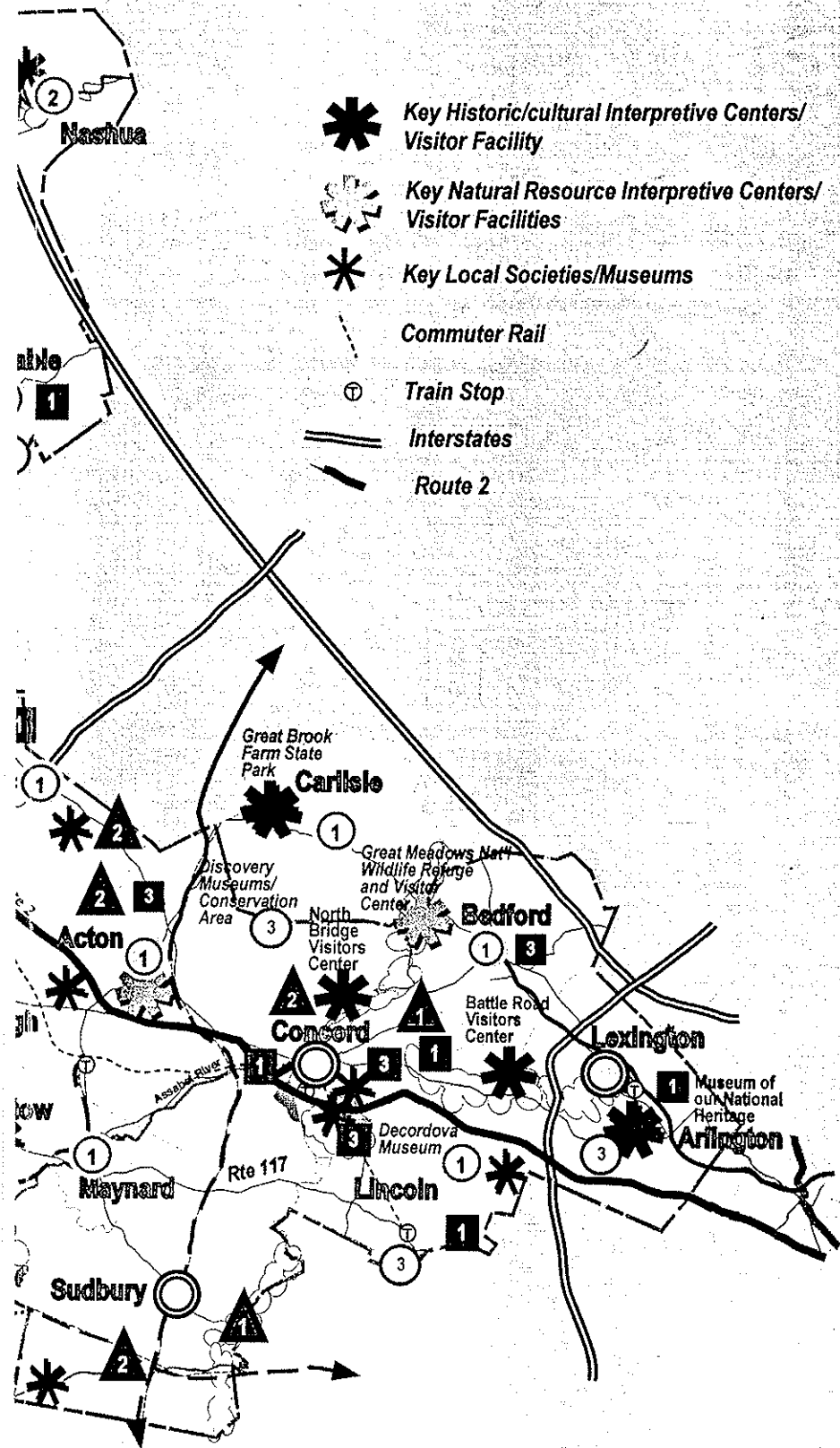
Interpretive Themes

The Native Landscape - focusing on the **land** and on pre-colonial Native American history: resources include geological history, special natural features, areas of old-growth forest, significant viewsheds, cultivated river valleys, native village sites, and old footpaths. Even modern patterns of settlement reflect the shape of the land and the nature of the climate.

Inventing the New England Landscape - the history of the early settlements and of their expansion and maturation. The emphasis is on the character of the **people** who have shaped the place and demonstrate the region's uniqueness. Resources include: town centers and early systems of self-governance, rural agricultural areas, and the old mill towns that grew into important industrial centers.

The Landscape of Democracy - the history of **ideas** in the area. The Freedom's Way area has a long history of social and intellectual innovation, including: the emergence of a democratic idea, the American Revolution, a tradition of religious freedom and experimentation, nationally influential movements for social justice, and the American Renaissance of the nineteenth century. It is important to give a picture of the intellectual history of the area as a whole, since that is the context in which the area's more famous thinkers (Emerson, Thoreau) lived and worked.

The Land Rediscovered - referring to the area's **natural and scenic landscape**, which characterizes the area. The movement for conservation and responsible use has its roots in this area. Resources include: conservation areas and important waterways and water sources, networks of trails and bikeways, and farmlands throughout the region.



Landscape of Democracy

- Freedom Resources
- Freedom Experiment Sites
- Justice Resources (Socialism, Civil Rights, Transcendentalism)

The Landscape Rediscovered

- Major Openspaces
- Existing Trails
- Proposed Trails

THE BELL OF THE FEDERATED CHURCH IN AYER

Researched by local historians Zelda Moore,
a Freedom's Way Board member,
and Ruth Rhonemus.

The Federated Church of Ayer began as the South Groton Orthodox Congregational Church and was founded in 1861.¹ In the beginning, the services of this church were held in Union Hall, then standing at the southerly end of Merchant's Row.

The Civil War began nearly the same date the church was formed. Coinciding with plans for the first service, a call came for troops from the North. Among those present at that first service were ten who joined the old Sixth Massachusetts Regiment the following day and were soon passing through the streets of Baltimore.

After the Church's formation, the society sought to erect its own house of worship and by 1864 a building committee had acquired a site. Built by Daniel G. Waters of Ayer, the new church cost \$8,000 including the furnishings, and was dedicated in September of 1867. Donations for the building of the church were generous: gifts came from fifty Congregational Churches; the pews came from the Universalist Church in Harvard; the railroad furnished free passes for the solicitors to travel seeking contributions. One interest free grant of \$500 from the American Congregational Union was repaid 99 years later (1966).

When the Town of Ayer was incorporated in 1871, the South Groton Orthodox Congregational Church changed its name to the First Congregational Church of Ayer.

In 1872, a bell was purchased from the Fitchburg society. With the installation of the bell to call worshippers to prayer, questions began to circulate about its origins. Reports about Gen. Benjamin Butler confiscating property during the Civil War had enraged Southerners. It was rumored that images of Butler, a Lowell resident, were being defiled in New Orleans. Newspaper editorials debated the legality of the confiscation. To learn the history of the church bell, the Hon. George J. Burns sent a letter of inquiry to the New Orleans Picayune:

"Ayer Mass, July 15, 1887 "Mr. Editor — The late controversy between General Butler and the Washington Post respecting New Orleans bells, calls to my attention, that on each Sabbath morning there peals forth in our quiet New England village the sonorous tones of one of those relics of our late unpleasantness...."

"The bell in question weighs about eight hundred pounds. Upon one side in relief are the words, 'B. D. Beavin, Plains, Miss., 1856,' and around the top, 'Cast by G. W. Coffin & Co., Buckeye Foundry, Cincinnati, 1856.'"

"It may interest its former owners and antebellum acquaintances to know its present resting place, as it would the writer to know its early history."

Geo. J. Burns"

Burns' letter was widely circulated in the Southern newspapers. In time, a reply came from the Meridian (Miss.) Daily News to G. J. Burns, Esq. A correspondence was opened between two members of the Beavin family and through it the early history of the bell was learned. In 1854, Mr. B. D. Beavin had been owner of the Plains Plantation, in Jefferson County, Mississippi, a homestead of about 1,400 acres. Mr. Beavin died soon after the war began. At the time of his death, the plantation was supported by the work of approximately 125 slaves. The Beavin plantation was off the traveled road and barely suffered from the war. When a demand came for material to cast cannon, the executors of Beavin's estate sent the bell to a public square in New Orleans where it was collected with other items for the foundry. And so it fell into the hands of the National forces under Gen. Butler.

A man called Uncle John Hedden was the slave who reamed the bell to the river landing from the Plains Plantation. Like many of his fellow freedmen, he remained on the plantation until his death in 1889.

The Federated Church is at 21 Washington Street, and the tones of the "relic of our late unpleasantness" are summoned by using a rope that hangs in the sanctuary.

¹The Federated Church eventually Included: the First Baptist Church, founded in 1851, The South Groton Orthodox Congregational Church, founded in 1861, and the Methodist-Episcopal Church, founded in 1869.

OF FURTHER INTEREST...

ALONG FITCHBURG'S MAIN STREET

The Trinitarian Church and the Underground Railroad

By Ruth Penka, Director

Fitchburg Historical Society

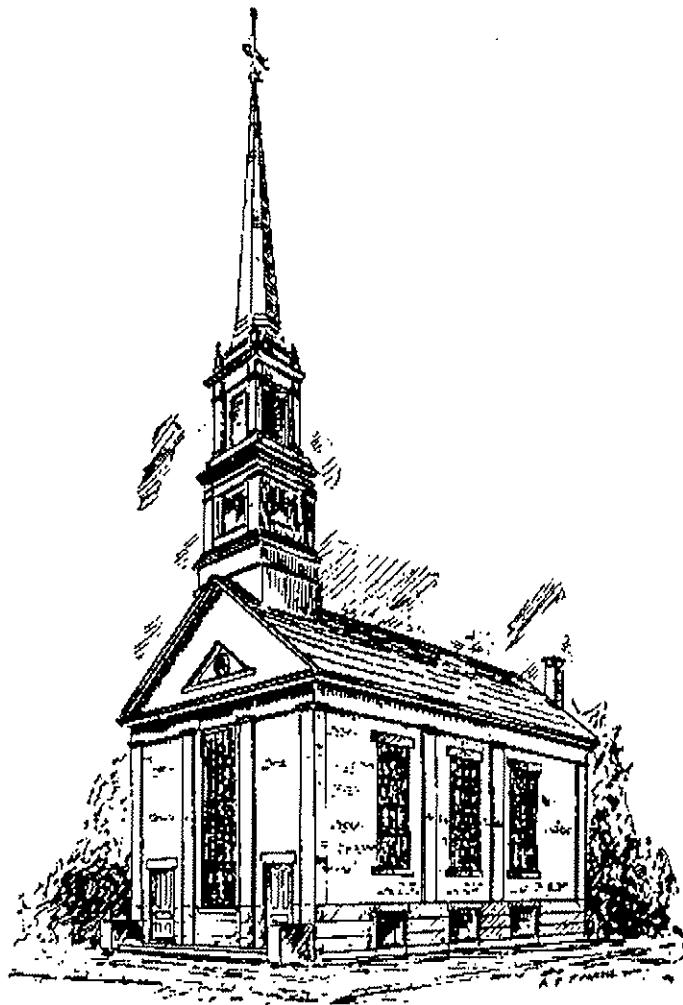
Founded in April of 1843, the Trinitarian Church was established after 29 members of Fitchburg's Calvinistic Congregational Church seceded in a desire to establish a church founded on anti-slavery beliefs. Located on "The Green" or "Fox Flats" which was open land between Oliver and Grove Streets, the Trinitarian Church was said to be a "stop" on the Underground Railroad. The Church published its booklet of "principles and rules" in 1843 and Rule 3 stated that "members of this Church shall not engage in slave-holding, or in apologizing for slavery." In his dedication sermon on October 16, 1844, the Reverend Philo C. Pettibone revealed the Church's abolitionist doctrine: "The overthrow of slavery in all its huge departments, and endless ramifications, is indispensable to the spread of Christ's Kingdom... Slavery is a conglomeration of every imaginable evil and cruelty." The Church's edifice was a simple stone and brick building with a steeple and a church bell that member Benjamin Snow had purchased at auction in Boston. Weighing 800 pounds, the bell had been used on a plantation in Mississippi to call slaves to and from work. Confiscated by Union officer, General Butler in New Orleans, where it had been sent to be cast into Confederate cannon, the bell was sent North for auction. Upon donating the bell to the Trinitarian Church, Mr. Snow stipulated that it was not to be rung until the slaves were freed.

When the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act went into effect, the Fitchburg newspaper, the *Reveille*, warned against "sensible men becoming blinded by negro-worship." In the Society's collection is a handwritten document signed by well-known Fitchburg men in opposition to the Law. It reads:

"The undersigned, believing the recent enactment of Congress, commonly entitled the *Fugitive Slave*, to be preeminently base and inhuman, hereby invite the citizens of Fitchburg to assemble in *Mass Meeting* - in the Town Hall ... to express, the judgment of Freemen upon it, and to take such action in relation to it, as duty to *God* and to *Humanity* may seem to require." The "Ladies" of Fitchburg were also invited to attend the meeting. Fitchburg citizens who signed the document would soon be called upon to put their beliefs to the test.

On a cold winter night in February of 1851 at the home of Samuel Crocker of West Fitchburg, a meeting was called to discuss the legality of the Fugitive Slave Law. The Reverend Enathan Davis, pastor of the Trinitarian Church known in Fitchburg as the "Apostle of Peace," expressed indignation at the arrest in Boston of three runaway slaves, Sims, Burns and Shadrach. The three slaves had been living in Boston and with the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, were arrested and brought to the U. S. Commissioner. Sims and Burns were tried, convicted of escaping from slavery, and returned to their masters. However, when Shadrach was brought before the Commissioner, he escaped with the aid of friends, was hurried into a carriage, and taken to a home in Concord. From there, as the story is told by Martha Snow Wallace, daughter of Fitchburg abolitionist and underground railroad conductor Benjamin Snow, Jr., "Shadrach was taken to Leominster to Mr. Jonathan Drake's house, and at supper time the following evening arrived at my father's [Benjamin Snow's house on Day Street] in Fitchburg At that time my father had a paper mill in West Fitchburg and his partner, Mr. Samuel Crocker, lived near it. He took Shadrach to Mr. Crocker's, where it happened a meeting was being held, and the question 'Shall the fugitive slave law be obeyed?' was being discussed."

In the midst of the discussion, a knock was heard at the door and out of the winter darkness appeared Benjamin Snow and a strange, dark figure said to be dressed in women's clothing. The person was Shadrach, who was given food, clothing and money to go to Canada and to freedom. Samuel Crocker sent Shadrach in his wagon to a stop along the underground railroad in Ashburnham and in good time, Shadrach sent back word of his safe arrival in Canada. In looking back on that winter evening, Mrs. Martha Crocker later wrote "what became of the majesty of the law that evening? It vanished and was forgotten in the presence of justice; it was not potent enough to stand before appealing human suffering and distress. When the visitors left for their homes every blessed one of them had broken the [Fugitive Slave] law." The bell in the steeple of the Trinitarian Church in Fitchburg finally had its chance to ring in January of 1863 when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation into law, which freed all slaves. Mr. Benjamin Snow, Jr., had the honor of climbing up the belfry and ringing the church's bell. The slavery issue being settled, the Trinitarian Society disbanded and in 1872, the bell was sold to the Congregational Church of Ayer. The proceeds from the sale of the bell were donated to the Freedman's Aid Society of Fitchburg.



TRINITARIAN CHURCH, 1872
Corner of Main and Church Streets.

BY THE WAY...

- May 30 Johnny Appleseed Visitor Center opens Route 2, Lancaster
- May 31 Exploring Concord Walking Tour, Concord Museum 10 am
- June 7 Ashby Historical Society House Tour and Dinner: Tour at 2pm, Dinner at 5pm. For ticket information Call: 508-386-7058 or 508-342-5902.
Harvard's Historic Graveyard. Speaker: Tom Malloy 2pm - Rain date June 8
Spirit of the Wolf Powwow, Saima Park, Fitchburg 508-345-9944
- June 8 La Rondinella: Concert in Fruitlands Museums Picture Gallery 1 1:30 - 1:00
- June 14 Riverfest at Nashua River Watershed Resource Center, Groton 508 448-0299
Music in the Orchard, Nashoba Valley Winery, Bolton 12-5
- June 19 Opening of Concord Band Summer Series Concerts, Fruitlands Museums, Thursdays, Harvard.
Fee: \$5.00 parking.
- June 20 New England Native American Institute Solstice Gatherings, Sterling Springs Campgrounds, Sterling
- June 21 Fruitlands 2nd Annual Barbecue and Dance Fundraiser for reinstallation of Indian Museum 6pm — Reservations required 508-456-3924

This newsletter is an invitation to membership. Your involvement can make a difference by helping to shape our area's plan. Together, we can protect our area's uniqueness through the creation of a Freedom's Way National Heritage Corridor.

UPDATE...

1. In the **third workshop**, we will investigate alternative plans for the Freedom's Way area. Under discussion will be the boundaries, strategies for resource protection, organization, and different approaches to the presentation of the area's resources.
2. The Alternatives workshop will be a very critical part of this study. We invite as many interested participants as possible to help make these decisions about the future of the corridor. **Please plan to attend.** If you have any questions or further information, please contact:

Mildred Chandler or Marge Darby
Freedom's Way Heritage Association
43 Buena Vista Street, Devens, MA 01433
Tel: (508) 772-3654

WHAT'S AHEAD...

WORKSHOP3 - JUNE 5 7:00 - 8:30 PM

We will return to the Devens Officer's Club for the third workshop which will focus on Alternatives. Our proposed study area from Nashua, New Hampshire to Mt. Wachusett, Lexington to Gardner, is large and the selection of the Officer's Club as a site for the workshops makes available a room large enough for both the presentation and small group discussions. Additionally, this site is a central location which has the best potential to maintain involvement from all the communities of the study area.

Directions: From Rt. 2, and I-495 interchange go West 6.5 miles to "Devens - Jackson Road", (exit #37B), go North on Jackson Road 1 mile from gate house to T-junction at Givry St.; turn left and go 350 ft.; turn right on Sherman Ave. and go to the entrance of the Officers Club, (1-storey building on Right, adjacent to the parade ground.)



Freedom's Way Heritage Association
43 Buena Vista Street
Fort Devens, MA 01433

TO: