

## **National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum**

Gerrit Smith Estate, Peterboro, NY

*"Liberty came to the freedmen of the United States, not in mercy, but in wrath, not by moral choice, but by military necessity." Frederick Douglass - 1874*

### **Why an Abolition Hall of Fame?**

The Abolition Hall of Fame (AHOF) will honor exemplary people from three centuries that have dedicated their lives, efforts, and personal wealth to gain equal rights for all. For the purposes of the Hall of Fame, abolition is recognized as both the legal ending of slavery, or the First Abolition, and the moral ending of discrimination, or the Second Abolition. The AHOF will also have a museum and a yearly Gerrit Smith Symposium that will provide many learning opportunities.

Peterboro was chosen as the site of the Hall of Fame to honor the work and dedication of Gerrit Smith. Smith's home in Peterboro was, for over three decades, an important station on the Underground Railroad. Smith dedicated his personal fortune and his work in the political arena to the abolishment of slavery. During his life, he attracted many prominent figures in the anti-slavery movement to his home.

In 2001 the United States Department of the Interior designated the Gerrit Smith Estate as a National Historic Landmark because it "was found to possess national significance in the history of the United States." Additionally, in 2004, both the Gerrit Smith Estate and the Smithfield Community Center were designated as two of the 24 sites for a new Statewide Underground Railroad Heritage Trail. Establishment of the Hall of Fame will complement several of these other projects that are well underway in Peterboro. While both the Land Office on the Estate and the Smithfield Community Center are being developed into museums to commemorate the life and work of Smith and the historical events that took place in Peterboro, the AHOF will provide an opportunity to understand other prominent figures in the abolition movement and the times in which they worked, and to study models of reform that address ongoing human rights issues.

### **What will occur at the Abolition Hall of Fame?**

The Abolition Hall of Fame will annually induct individuals from the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries who demonstrate commitment to all facets of abolition. The AHOF will also develop a museum of abolition, a yearly Gerrit Smith symposium and promote the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Peterboro model of cultural diversity.

#### *Hall of Fame Inductees*

The Cabinet of Freedom is a board committed to the goals and needs of the AHOF. People on the board represent a wide swath of interests, abilities and skills. Representatives from the Smithfield Community Association and Gerrit Smith Estate National Historic Landmark are among the representatives who sit on the board.

Representatives from the board will develop criteria and nominate individuals for the AHOF.

Yearly, inductions will be held on the weekend closest to October 22, the date of the inaugural meeting of the New York State Antislavery Society in Peterboro in 1835. The induction will include a biographical presentation, reasons for the inductee's recognition, and an exhibit plaque. Portraits and plaques will hang in the public hall of the Smithfield Community Center, the site of the New York State Antislavery Meeting in 1835. The first ten inductees will be announced in March, 2005 and formally inducted on October 22, 2005.

### *Abolition Museum*

The Abolition Hall of Fame Museum will include exhibits on individual inductees and on abolition in general, particularly in New York State. Ongoing study and recognition of the significance of the Underground Railroad provide legitimacy and credence to the work of the AHOF and its museum portion. Simulations and interactive exhibits will provide opportunities for students of all ages, as well as the general public, to develop a deeper understanding about the dynamics of abolition and the human rights movement.

### *Gerrit Smith Symposium*

The Gerrit Smith Symposium will provide a multi-day opportunity for study about the many facets of abolition as well as the life and work of Gerrit Smith. Participants will be able to understand the significance of the Gerrit Smith Estate National Historic Landmark, while learning about Smith's life and work. Information about that year's 19<sup>th</sup> Century inductees and his/her relationship with Gerrit Smith will be examined. Participants will also have the opportunity to learn about the New York State Antislavery Society Meeting and the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Peterboro model of cultural diversity. Notably, there will also be programs to assist elementary and secondary school teachers in using history as way to deepen understanding of cultural diversity, past and present.

### **What role will Colgate University play in the AHOF?**

Representatives from the University and the Upstate Institute are active participants in the project and members of the Cabinet of Freedom, the AHOF board. Therefore, they will play an important role in developing guidelines for inductees and nominating inductees as well as development of the museum and symposium. Additionally, Colgate students, who serve as Upstate Student Fellows will provide support throughout the development of the project. Currently, Upstate Fellow Kia King is working on a website and PowerPoint presentation to present to funders and other interested parties. Colgate students will also play a major role in the induction ceremony in October 2005 (likely portraying the inductees in a theatrical performance). Student Fellows will also serve as docents for the AHOF Museum.

### **What benefits will the Abolition Hall of Fame bring?**

The Abolition Hall of Fame and its components will highlight the stirring and important work of abolitionists past and present. Cultural, educational and economic benefits to the region and the project's participants are many.

Colgate University students, particularly students of color, participating in the project will develop a deeper connection to the region, through a greater understanding of the history of the abolition movement and the role that Central New York played in the Underground Railroad Movement. Over the long term, students and others will not only see the cultural role that the region played in these movements, but be able to see the geographic relevance of the region in the Underground Railroad.

By inducting individuals from many eras to the Hall of Fame, the effort will highlight, not only prominent abolitionists, but also those whose work is less visible but equally important in the fight for freedom and equal rights for all. Overall, the Hall of Fame will highlight the many roles and the variety of people who have helped make progress on these issues.

Growth of the AHOF will create an educational resource that will develop a center of study not only for abolition issues, but also on issues of diversity, multiculturalism and the development of civil rights in American society. Application of these resources will serve not only teachers at all levels but the general public as well.

It is also anticipated that there will be some increased tourism to the area from those who are interested in the AHOF and the Gerrit Smith Symposium. Peterboro is home to two sites on the Underground Railroad Heritage Trail and an annual Civil War Weekend. Further developing these sites and projects along with the AHOF will make Peterboro a destination.