



**CITY OF BIRMINGHAM
MUSEUM BOARD AGENDA
556 W MAPLE
Thursday, February 1, 2024
5:00 PM**

Mission Statement: *The Birmingham Museum will explore meaningful connections with our past, in order to enrich our community and enhance its character and sustainability. Our mission is to promote understanding of Birmingham's historical and cultural legacy through preservation and interpretation of its ongoing story.*

1. Call to Order

2. Roll Call

3. Approval of the Minutes

Minutes of January 4, 2023

4. New Business

- A. Presentation/Discussion with Brian Devlin of Nagy Devlin Land Design RE: landscape design for pathways and pond area/implementation of Landscape Master Plan

5. Communication and Reports

- A. Director Report
- B. Member comments
- C. Public comments

6. Next Meeting: March 7, 2024

7. Adjournment

NOTICE: Individuals with disabilities requiring accommodations for effective participation in this meeting should contact the city clerk's office at (248) 530-1880 (voice), or (248) 644-5115 (TDD) at least one day in advance to request mobility, visual, hearing or other assistance. *APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MUSEUM BOARD MEETINGS ARE AVAILABLE IN THE CITY CLERK'S OFFICE AND ON THE CITY WEBSITE AT www.bhamgov.org.* City of Birmingham, 151 Martin, Birmingham, MI 48009; 248.530.1800. Persons with disabilities that may require assistance for effective participation in this public meeting should contact the City Clerk's Office at the number (248) 530-1880, or (248) 644-5115 (for the hearing impaired) at least one day before the meeting to request help in mobility, visual, hearing, or other assistance.

Las personas con incapacidad que requieren algún tipo de ayuda para la participación en esta sesión pública deben ponerse en contacto con la oficina del escribano de la ciudad en el número (248) 530-1800 o al (248) 644-5115 (para las personas con incapacidad auditiva) por lo menos un día antes de la reunión para solicitar ayuda a la movilidad, visual, auditiva, o de otras asistencias. (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964).



**CITY OF BIRMINGHAM
MUSEUM BOARD MEETING
556 W. Maple
Thursday, January 4, 2024
5:00 PM**

Members Present: Kristy Barrett (Alternate), Bev Erickson, Alexandra Harris,
Judith Keefer, Marty Logue
Members Absent: Caroline Ashleigh, Pat Hughes, Jay Shell
Student Members Present: Alex Motea
Administration: Museum Director Leslie Pielack
Guests: None

The meeting was called to order at 5:00 PM by Chairperson Logue.

**Approval of the Minutes
Minutes of December 7, 2023**

MOTION: by Erickson, seconded by Keefer:

To approve the minutes of December 7, 2023.

VOTE: Yeas, 5
Nays, 0

New Business

Members reviewed the museum's long range plan that will be presented to the City Commission on January 20. Each City department's long range plan identifies key projects and efforts for the coming year, and includes components related to the City Commission's goals. The museum will be focusing on a significant revision of its strategic plan and the continued implementation of its landscape master plan for the pond and Rouge area.

Museum Director Pielack presented a summary of the coming strategic plan process. The existing plan has served well over the last ten years, and the museum has been able to achieve many objectives in the plan. With ongoing change in our communities, audience, and technology, it is important to gauge the needs of our public through gathering feedback, research in best practices and the history field, and other information to plan for the next ten years. The project is expected to take approximately a year to complete to be as comprehensive as possible.

Communication and Reports

Museum Director Pielack reviewed the Director Report and provided additional detail on the number of presentations that museum staff will be giving through the Baldwin Library, Next, and also the special Saturday series for Black History Month. A major free presentation is also planned for January 31 at the Southfield Public Library that will feature the museum's five-community Underground Railroad project with a special program by

museum volunteer Joy Young on the amazing story of Southfield's freedom seeker John Sella Martin.

Member Comments

None

Public Comments

None.

The next Regular Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 1 2024, at 5:00 PM.

Ms. Logue adjourned the meeting at 5:40 PM.

DRAFT

DATE: February 1, 2024
TO: Museum Board
FROM: Leslie Pielack, Museum Director
SUBJECT: Director Report

Long Range Planning—the Commission met on January 20 to hear all City department Long Range Plans. There is an effort to incorporate sustainability initiatives citywide, which is reflected in our two primary initiatives in the LRP-Phase III of the Pond Zone (materials and landscape plantings) and our planned revision of the museum's Strategic Plan with a 10 year outlook and shorter-term objectives

Budget Planning—As reported at a recent Museum Board meeting, our budget request this year will include

- construction of Phase III of the Master Landscape Plan (pond zone boardwalk and pathway), partly funded by CDBG funding
- completion of roof repairs/restoration of balcony and north porch
- replacement of aging and inefficient lobby and upstairs HVAC units and water heater with efficient units as part of sustainability efforts
- requested personnel hours increases

Presentations, Presentations, Presentations—We have been receiving many requests for presentations and are doing our best to keep up with them. Organizations include the Baldwin Public Library, Next, other area historical societies, libraries, and senior living facilities. All four staff are involved, and programs range from our regular lecture series to private group presentations. Topics include Underground Railroad and/or Black history, Indigenous archaeology, basket making, and Saginaw Trail, *Creem*, other area history. We are also being asked to give presentations in other communities, reinforcing the importance of our strategy of providing outreach through public presentations.

Oakland County Board of Commissioners Proclamations—Commissioners recognized the Birmingham Museum and four other area historical organizations for their accomplishments in the UGRR project and research. Proclamations to be publicly presented on Wednesday, January 31 at the Southfield Public Library at the program presented by Joy Young, volunteer at our museum, presenting on John Sella Martin, one of the freedom seekers identified in the project (see attached draft).

UGRR Project Traveling Exhibit and Website Launch—Four exhibit panels featuring abolitionists and freedom seekers identified in our first project year are featured on new traveling exhibit banners. They will be hosted throughout Oakland County over the next three years at libraries, civic institutions, etc. (see example of Birmingham-RO panel). The interactive web map is set to launch 1/31 and has similar information, which can be viewed at <https://ugrr.mioaklandhistory.org/>

AIPC—The survey period will be winding down and the Aging in Place Committee will be working in the next few months to digest results and do more research to make recommendations to the City Commission.

Tourism Council—The museum is part of a committee representing local business, cultural institutions, and others who are looking for ways to collaborate to develop interesting and innovative events and programs to attract regional visitors to our area. This may include the museum offering specialty tours and training others to give local tours of historic interest.

Proclamation

HONORING

OAKLAND COUNTY UNDERGROUND RAILROAD PUBLIC HISTORY PROJECT

Birmingham Museum

WHEREAS, efforts in our communities to uncover and share our collective history, such as the Oakland County Underground Railroad Public History Project, deserve to be recognized; and

WHEREAS, with the goal of conducting evidence-based research through collaboration with Oakland County communities, volunteers and existing local collections, the history project has resulted in a traveling exhibit that tells the story of the Underground Railroad in Oakland County. This set of four displays will be presented in public areas such as schools, libraries and civic organizations, and it includes information about the local networks that helped thousands of freedom seekers escape enslavement; and

WHEREAS, five pilot communities have spearheaded the research for this initial phase of the project. The Birmingham Museum, Farmington Historical Society, Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society (Pontiac), Royal Oak Historical Society and Southfield Historical Society have identified 12 freedom seekers and 11 abolitionists, with several others still under study in the five-community area; and

WHEREAS, the Oakland County Underground Railroad Public History Project is dedicated to accuracy and cultural appropriateness for the communities it covers. Carol Bacak-Egbo and Rosie Richardson have been brought onto the project as historical and cultural consultants, respectively. The project is funded in part by Michigan Humanities, an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities; and

WHEREAS, on the special occasion of this first presentation of the Oakland County Underground Railroad Public History Project, we join with the five pilot communities to thank them for their contributions.

NOW THEREFORE, David T. Woodward, Chair of the Oakland County Board of Commissioners, and Commissioners Yolanda Smith Charles and Linney Taylor do hereby proclaim special commendation the Oakland County Underground Railroad Public History Project.

Attested on this 31st day of January 2024, in Pontiac, Michigan.



David T. Woodward, Chair
Oakland County Board of Commissioners

Yolanda Smith Charles
County Commissioner, District #17

Linnie Taylor
County Commissioner, District #18

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

BIRMINGHAM & ROYAL OAK

BIRMINGHAM

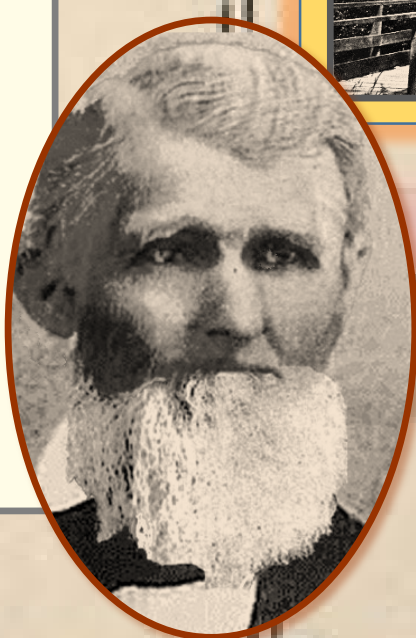
Birmingham was founded in 1818, the **second settlement in Oakland County** after Pontiac. Early settlers were abolitionist minded and participated in anti-slavery groups in Pontiac and Detroit. The town hosted noted national speakers and **famous Black abolitionists at public lectures** through the late 1850s, and was an active commercial and political center for rural areas nearby such as Southfield and Troy.

Freedom seekers appear to have passed through the community rather than settle here, possibly because surrounding rural areas offered greater anonymity or employment opportunities.

By the 1890s, formerly enslaved people did find a place in Birmingham, and called it home for many generations into the 20th century.

Elijah Staunton Fish (1794-1861)

Elijah Fish was a pioneer settler of Birmingham who held strong abolitionist views and who founded (and became Deacon of) **Birmingham's First Presbyterian Church**. He supported the abolitionist movement from early on, co-founding the **Oakland County Anti-Slavery and Discussion Society** in 1836 with fellow abolitionists **George Wisner** of Pontiac and **Nathan Power** of Farmington. Fish brought anti-slavery lecturers to Birmingham, provided funds and supplies to the UGRR, and worked with Black abolitionist **Henry Bibb** to purchase property in Ontario for resettlement of freedom seekers. His burial site at **Greenwood Cemetery** in Birmingham is listed on the UGRR Network to Freedom.



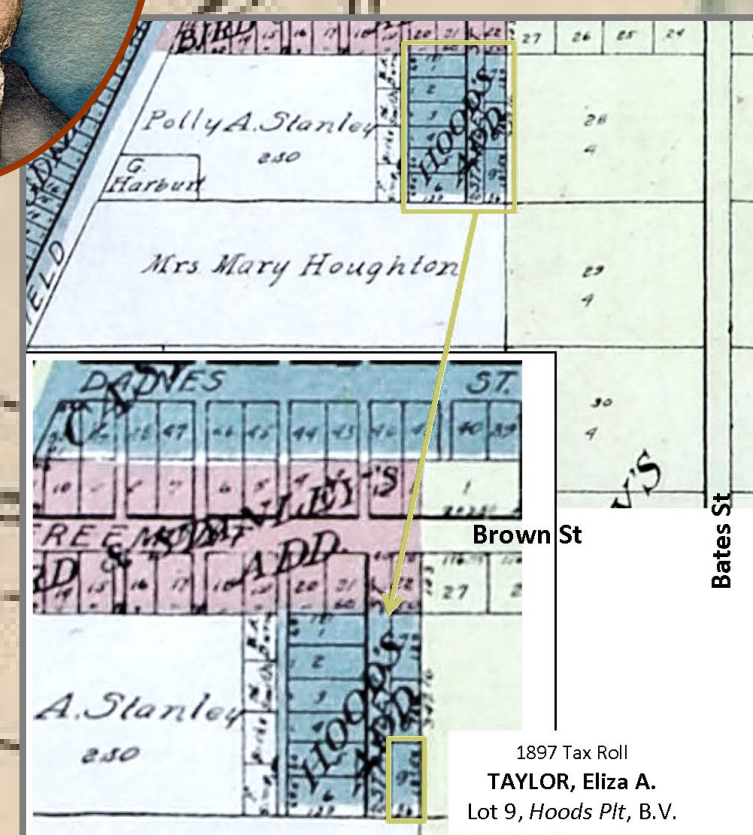
BLACK or NATIVE AMERICAN? Many freedom seekers and free persons of color had mixed racial heritage that included Native American and African American ancestry. Sometimes it was more beneficial to identify as Black. Free Blacks could own property and had other legal rights, but Native Americans, were legally viewed as foreigners on U.S. soil and had no rights as citizens until the 1920s.



Find out more!
See a **COOL ONLINE INTERACTIVE MAP, LOTS MORE INFO, & SOURCES** on the UGRR in Oakland County!

George Basil Taylor (c.1823-1901)

George Taylor fled enslavement in Kentucky in 1855, traveling 300 miles on foot to Michigan, where he found the UGRR and passage to Canada. In 1858, he came back to the Southfield's **Covenanter Church** community to farm. Taylor's lifelong association with the church's abolitionist minister, **J.S.T. Milligan**, suggests Milligan may have helped him in his original flight to Canada. In 1873, George and his formerly enslaved wife **Eliza Dosier** followed Milligan to Kansas. In 1893, they returned to Birmingham, becoming the **first Black property owners** there. Taylor's burial site at **Greenwood Cemetery** is listed on the UGRR Network to Freedom.



ROYAL OAK

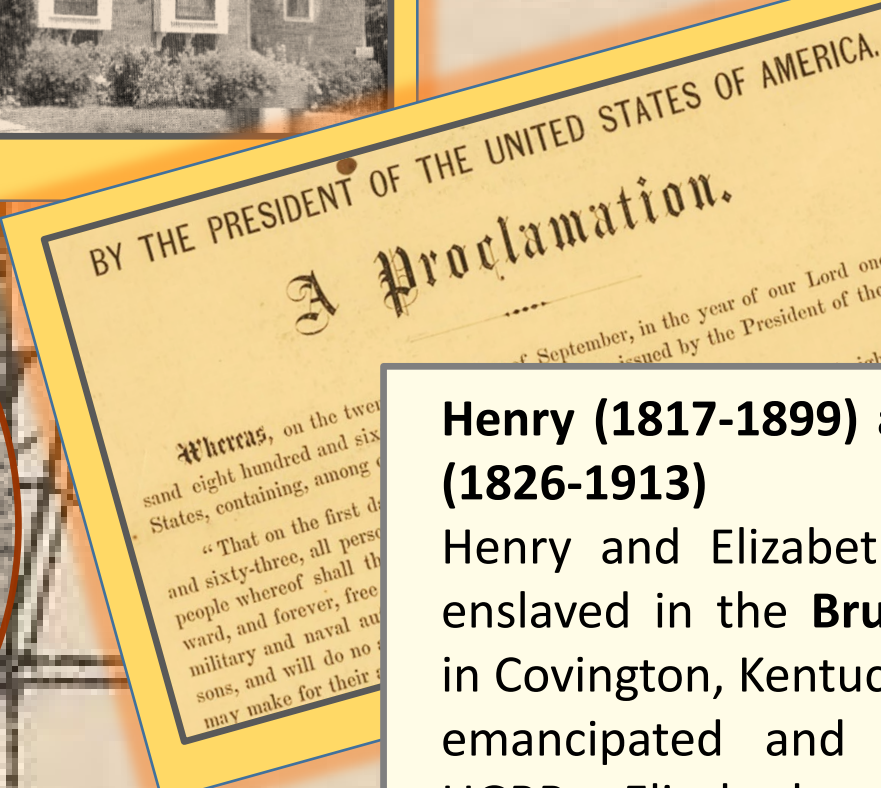
Royal Oak was located at the **juncture of ancient Indian trails** that soon became major roads. By 1843, the addition of a **railroad line between Detroit and Pontiac** through downtown Royal Oak made the small town a busy transportation hub. Royal Oak's connections south to Detroit, as well as north and east toward other border crossings made it likely that many freedom seekers passed through. However, the town

was not an active anti-slavery community, and **no documented abolitionists** have been found.

Even so, from 1830 on, free Black and mixed race settlers and their extended families were locating in the area. In the 1850s and 1860s, census records reflect a pattern of unrelated **minor Black or mixed race children** living in these households, suggesting that an UGRR network may have been operating.

Hamlet (1785-1880) and Jane Harris (1795-1882) and Family

The Harris family was one of the **first free Black/multi-racial families** in Oakland County, coming from Georgia with their adult children and settling in the 1830s wilderness of what is now Berkley. Hamlet, who was **Indigenous Cherokee**, **bought his wife Jane out of enslavement** in Georgia and took her surname. From 1850-1870, the Harris family **housed or fostered** a number of apparently unrelated Black children and adults. This suggests that they actively supported freedom seekers and the abolitionist cause. The multi-racial Harrises prospered, and **three generations of their descendants** helped shape the history of both Royal Oak Township and Birmingham.



Henry (1817-1899) and Elizabeth Hamer (1826-1913)

Henry and Elizabeth Hamer were both enslaved in the **Bruce family** household in Covington, Kentucky. In 1856, they self-emancipated and fled north via the UGRR. Elizabeth, who was pregnant, waited in Windsor, Canada, for Henry to seek work and a safe place to live. They settled in Royal Oak. After achieving freedom, the Hamers **corresponded briefly with their former enslavers**, whose letters have survived. They bought property, raised their family, and with their descendants, made their mark on Royal Oak. The **Hamer Finch Wilkins Park** is named for them. Their burial sites are listed on the UGRR Network to Freedom.

CENSUS INCONSISTENCY: "BLACK," "WHITE" or "MULATTO"? In 1850, the federal census began to classify all people of apparent mixed racial and cultural backgrounds simply as "Mulatto," while classifying those of apparent African American ancestry as "Black" or "Negro." The catchall "Mulatto" could be applied to people of any heritage, and complicates historical research. Census takers, who were from the local community and usually knew the people they were recording, subjectively interpreted its application and used it inconsistently. It is common to find census records across the decades in which the same family members are classified as "Black," "Mulatto," and "White."

DESCRIPTION.

White, Black, or Mulatto.

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