



For Immediate Release

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Greenwood Cemetery Listed in National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom

BIRMINGHAM, MI, April 5, 2022—The City of Birmingham’s historic Greenwood Cemetery is one of 16 additions to the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. The National Park Service announced the additions following an application submitted by The Birmingham Museum’s Director, Leslie Pielack.

Pielack applied for this national designation of the burial sites of abolitionist Elijah S. Fish, and freedom seeker George B. Taylor, both buried in Greenwood, whose stories were uncovered late last year. “It was a team approach. Museum staff members and local historians worked hard to uncover the incredible stories of Fish and Taylor,” said Pielack. “We are excited to see them recognized nationally, and to shed light on their truly remarkable lives.”

Pielack details how researchers discovered one clue at a time, working backward in time to put the pieces together for both extraordinary men. Birmingham settler Elijah Fish established the first local Presbyterian Church in his barn, and helped found the Oakland County Anti-Slavery Society in 1836, before the State of Michigan organized its society. He worked all his life to help freedom seekers escape enslavement, and provided money and supplies to help them reach freedom.

George Taylor’s life was very different. Following a public whipping in Kentucky, he escaped slavery with a grueling journey to Michigan by nightfall and on foot. During his flight, he was briefly captured and held prisoner, shot at, and nearly died from hunger and exposure. Taylor and his wife, Eliza, later became the first African Americans to own property in Birmingham in the late 19th century.

“The freedom seekers and allies highlighted in each Network to Freedom listing remind us of what can be accomplished when people take action against injustice,” said National Program Manager of the Network to Freedom, Diane Miller. “Each listing holds a unique part of the Underground Railroad story.”

Until last year, the Taylors’ graves in Greenwood cemetery had remained unmarked. The Birmingham Museum helped coordinate a fundraiser with the Friends of the Birmingham Museum and the Piety Hill Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution for grave markers. The campaign was enthusiastically embraced by the community and far exceeded expectations. “Within a couple months, we had raised nearly \$16,000 from all over the U.S.,” said Pielack. “It was gratifying to see such broad support to recognize the Taylors’ lives with a proper marker that acknowledges their story. The marker is expected to be installed later this year with the inscription, ‘Born into slavery/Died free in Birmingham’.”

The Birmingham Museum Board is planning a public celebration of Greenwood Cemetery’s national recognition later this year. The community is encouraged to keep an eye on the museum’s webpage and social media channels for event details coming soon.

“We want to continue to uncover the untold stories of Birmingham and its people,” said Pielack. “Our local history has even more to offer, but it takes some work to find it. These people and their stories make up the fabric of who we are today, and they help us understand our community’s roots in the past, where we are now, and where we are going.”

Learn more about The Birmingham Museum at www.bhamgov.org/museum, and about Greenwood Cemetery and the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom listing at www.bhamgov.org/undergroundrailroad.

*The Birmingham Museum is currently open to the public **Tuesday-Friday, 1 to 4 PM**, and by appointment. The museum also provides online content and educational materials about Birmingham's story. We also feature regular social media posts and videos on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/TheBirminghamMuseum/>) and Twitter (https://twitter.com/bham_museum). More video content on our current exhibit, lectures on historic Birmingham, and educational video shorts for adults and children can be found on our YouTube channel at https://www.bhamgov.org/history/museum/lecture_presentation_videos.php Want to know more about us? Check us out at www.bhamgov.org/museum. Or contact us by phone at **248-530-1928**.*

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