

# Freedom Crossing Monument

A tribute to the courageous conductors and  
passengers of the Underground Railroad.  
Lewiston, New York



## 1902 Tribute to Josiah Tryon Lewiston's Volunteer Underground Station Master and Greatest Citizen

*"To the readers of these words of the past, there is another record book to be opened up when this and all earthly volumes have passed away. When the page of Lewiston is turned, it will not be the names of the leading men in the worldly sense who will stand highest in the record.*

*"At the head of all will be the name of one of the lowliest as to place; one of the poorest as to men; and one of the feeblest as to the strength of the band of pioneers. While others lived for this world, he made this world a stepping stone to another and higher world for others, as well as for himself.*

*"Whole generations of the young call him blessed in their age, for he led them in and shielded them with counsel and prayer.*

*"Poor in this world's goods, for he shared with the poor to his loss. He made his treasure that hope whose fulfillment is heaven.*

*"In the heavenly reminiscences of Lewiston, the first name will be that of Josiah Tryon."*

-- Joshua Cooke  
Souvenir History of Niagara County, 1902



**Historical Association of Lewiston, Inc.  
& The Lewiston Museum**

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**FREEDOM CROSSING MONUMENT  
Lewiston, New York**

June 25, 2008

Niagara County Greenway Host Committee

The Historical Association of Lewiston, Inc, respectfully solicits your support for Greenway funds for the Freedom Crossing Monument, to be located on the bank of the Niagara River in Lewiston.

We are proud to report to you that the Freedom Crossing Monument has:

- Been the first project to receive approval from the Niagara River Greenway Commission.
- Received unanimous approved by the Town of Lewiston.
- Received unanimous approval by the Village of Lewiston.
- Been unanimously endorsed by the Lower Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce.
- Received \$50,000 in private grants.

The Freedom Crossing Monument, a bronze monument that will last over 1000 years, will commemorate Western New York's role in helping slaves escape to Canada. Tens of thousands of Western New Yorkers were strict abolitionists in the mid 1800s, many of whom became active and secret volunteers in the Underground Railroad, putting their families and livelihoods at risk.

The monument will highlight Josiah Tryon, the local Underground Railroad Station Master, who secretly organized area volunteers to assist fugitive slaves in their treacherous journey. Josiah Tryon, without question, is considered Lewiston's greatest citizen because of his commitment to protecting and freeing the enslaved who trusted him with their lives. His role, and that of his volunteer colleagues, could be considered as this area's finest moment in history.

The monument will be placed on the bank of the Niagara River in Lewiston, the actual site where hundreds of escaping slaves made their last stop on their way across the river to freedom in Canada. This will be recognized as an iconic landmark and will be celebrated internationally as a focal point for the triumph of the human spirit over oppression and slavery.

It is also important to note that the book, Freedom Crossing, written by local author Margaret

Goff Clark (now deceased) is required reading for thousands of 5th graders across the United States every year. The fictional teenage heroine of the book, Laura Eastman, will be one of the subjects immortalized in the Monument.

We ask that \$180,000 of the Town's Greenway funds be allocated for this important project -- a small percentage of the more than one million dollars that will be available by July 2008.

These funds will be supplemented by \$50,000 in private donations. We are hoping for completion and unveiling by the Fall of 2009.

When the Monument was showcased on a Greenway tour of state, local and Greenway officials in early 2007, State Parks Commissioner, Carol Ash, reviewed the plans and stated the concept of the Monument "was wonderful."

We hope the Niagara Host Committee feels the same way and will embrace this project to advance Lewiston's position in the burgeoning "heritage tourism" market, while educating our local citizens and visitors alike that what took place in our hometown 160 years ago had a significant impact on our national culture. It was a time when Americans stood up and ignored an unjust law and took it upon themselves to undertake a higher calling. It was a calling that gave them the strength and courage to help hungry, sick and poor fugitives to find a life of freedom and opportunity across the border.

This will be our gift to future generations of area residents -- celebrating our legacy and proudest moment in local history. The Monument will stand for hundreds of years as a testament to the inspiration our forefathers gave us in overcoming oppression and slavery. It will serve as a touch point in linking past and future generations in the realization that our liberty and freedom can never be taken for granted.

Sincerely,

Lee Simonson, Volunteer Project Director  
Freedom Crossing Monument

Diane Finkbeiner, President  
Historical Association of Lewiston, Inc.

Pam Hauth, Executive Director  
Historical Association of Lewiston, Inc.

### OVERVIEW

The Freedom Crossing Monument will commemorate Lewiston's role in helping enslaved African Americans from the South escape to Canada in the mid-nineteenth Century. Tens of thousands of Western New Yorkers were strict abolitionists, many of whom became active and secret volunteers in the Underground Railroad, putting their families and livelihoods at risk. It is also important to note that the book, *Freedom Crossing*, a story based in Lewiston, NY and written by local author Margaret Goff Clark (now deceased) is required reading for thousands of 5th graders across the United States.

The monument, anticipated to be unveiled in 2009, will highlight the importance the Niagara River played as a "gateway to freedom" for hundreds escaping the tyranny of slavery and will celebrate the River's role as a focal point for the triumph of the human spirit over oppression.

The 8-10 foot high Monument will be cast in bronze, last thousands of years, and designed to highlight the actual activity of a slave family setting foot in a rowboat to take the final leg of their long and treacherous journey to freedom. The Monument will depict volunteer Underground Station Master Josiah Tryon of Lewiston, handing a small slave child to the outstretched arms of his mother who is already seated in the rowboat. On shore, will be the child's father who, with the guidance of Laura Eastman (the heroine in the book *Freedom Crossing*) looks out to Canada for the first time and can actually "see" freedom waiting.

The Monument will also depict the father holding a crooked wooden cane. There are historical reports that as soon as the father saw Canada across the river, he gave his cane to Josiah and said, "I will soon stand straight and tall like a free man, Josiah. This is all I have to remind me of my former life. I want you to have it. I won't be needing it any more."



**Freedom Crossing Monument  
(view from south)**

Here is a clay concept model of the Freedom Crossing Monument that depicts slaves being helped into a rowboat on the banks of the Niagara River -- an exciting moment because the slaves had traveled hundreds of miles to reach this destination and to see the "promised land" of Canada and freedom across the river.

The Monument will be "interactive" and will enable tourists and visitors to sit in the rowboat -- not only to have their pictures taken, but to imagine what it would have felt like during the final moments during the slaves' quest for freedom.

## THE MONUMENT AND THE NIAGARA GREENWAY

The Freedom Crossing Monument was the first project to be approved by the Niagara River Greenway Commission.

The Monument fits perfectly with the Greenway philosophy because it will represent the historical value of the river which borders Canada. It will serve to protect the river front as a sacred piece of history, while at the same time informing visitors of one of the most significant historical events in our nation's history.

The Greenway was also "Freedom's Way" and the Monument will become a permanent interpretive landmark for our valued and fascinating heritage, providing a dramatic presentation for those interested in learning how the Niagara River shaped our local culture and how thousands of escaping slaves found freedom by crossing the Niagara River.



**Freedom Crossing Monument  
(view from east)**

The proposed Monument will advance the Greenway philosophy in several ways as it represents how our geography and international border shaped the local culture and abolitionist attitudes here in Western New York.

### **1) How River Shaped Local Culture:** Because

Lewiston is situated on the Niagara River, local citizens in the early to mid-1800s took a leading role in helping the enslaved escape to Canada. This was the final stop to the "promised land" and local citizens, despite risking prison and fines, volunteered to assist escaping slaves to freedom. That's why the Niagara River, as the international boundary, is an ideal venue to host a recognized monument in tribute to freedom and the critical role the river played in the activities and route of the Underground Railroad.

**2) Education/Interpretive:** This proposed project, which has the strong potential of becoming a destination landmark, will dramatically boost the public's understanding of the Underground Railroad, Western New York's role, and provide a valuable and educational attraction for thousands of annual tourists and visitors to the area. Moreover, is the educational message the Monument will represent and convey -- that the scourge of slavery was not universally accepted in the United States, and despite the law of the land, thousands of Western New Yorkers put their lives and families at risk by helping to harbor and escort slaves to freedom.

**3) Heritage Tourism:** Not only does this complement the burgeoning Niagara Greenway philosophy which extends from Buffalo to Youngstown, but the Freedom Crossing Monument will also provide an additional local venue to leverage other attractions such as Niagara Falls and Fort Niagara, thus adding to our cultural and heritage “inventory” that will translate into more visitor dollars while promoting local economic development.

## COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

The volunteers of the Historical Association of Lewiston (see roster at bottom of page) have worked diligently over the past 18 months to see the vision of the Freedom Crossing Monument become a reality. In fact, the Monument was showcased on a Greenway tour of state, local and Greenway officials in early 2007 when the State Parks Commissioner, Carol Ash, reviewed plans and stated the concept of the Monument was “wonderful.”

### Historical Association of Lewiston, Inc. Board of Trustees

<b>Volunteer Board Members</b>	<b>Occupation</b>
Diane Finkbeiner, President	Owner/President, Barton Hill Hotel, Lewiston
Lee Simonson, Vice President	Owner, Conference Solutions and OrangePoint Communications
Jeffrey Williams, Treasurer	Former Niagara County Legislator / Chairman President, Apartments Niagara Board Member, NY State Thruway Authority
Anne Daggett, Secretary	Account Executive, Verizon
Chris Connelly	President, Kinetic Kitchen & Bath, Inc.
Judith Kohl, Ed.D.	Retired, Acting Superintendent of St. Mary's School for the Deaf
Joseph Lauzonis	Lewiston-Porter Teacher, History Club Asvisor
Ralph Penale	Retired, Director of Comm. Education and Athletic Director, Niagara Falls Board of Education
Bruce Sutherland	Retired, Colonel, US Air Force, Captain, Southwest Airlines
Beth Cerreto	Owner, Daycare
Timothy Henderson	Town of Lewiston, Historical Interpreter, Author, Marble Orchard, Board Member, Lewiston Council on Arts
Sandra Maslen	Former Supervisor, Town of Lewiston
Gayle Walton	Former Docent, Virginia Museum of Fine Art

## MONUMENT SETTING AND VIEWS

As seen in this satellite photo, the Freedom Crossing Monument will be situated in the Village of Lewiston's public park along the east bank of the Lower Niagara River.

There are no SEQRA requirements that we are aware of that involve placing a monument in a high traffic public park setting, but if necessary, we will work with the Village of Lewiston to fulfill any necessary requirements to comply with the law. There are no wetlands, natural habitats or plant and animal species that will be threatened.

**Site of  
Freedom  
Crossing  
Monument**



The Lewiston Park on the Niagara River has seen extensive improvements over the past years as the Village has sought to increase green space and parking accommodations. The Park is seeing a dramatic increase in visitors recently because of business and civic activity, including the renovation of the old Riverside Inn (now Water Street Landing and the Whirlpool Jet Boat), the ongoing operations of the Silo Restaurant, the continued popularity of the boat launch, and the removal of the Village's old Public Works Building. Moreover, the recent opening of the Barton Hill Hotel, which overlooks the Park and river, will direct more interest to this historic site.



Here is a superimposed image of the bronze Monument that provides a better (though approximate) idea of the vantage point of the site. That's Canada across the Niagara River. Escaping slaves would have experienced the same view as they arrived at the river's edge -- just a few hundred yards from their destination after a long and treacherous journey.



Here is another view from the south. The Monument is designed to be "approachable" to enable visitors to get next to it and interact with it. The Monument will become a "touch point" to the past and our proud heritage.

## MONUMENT BUDGET AND GREENWAY FUNDING

We are requesting \$180,000 from the Host Committee, via the Town of Lewiston's Greenway allocation. This will be supplemented by \$50,000 in private funds that have already been raised with approved grant sources, including The Margaret L. Wendt Foundation and the KeyBank Foundation.

Total project costs are projected to be approximately \$230,000 (depending on the price of copper which fluctuates).

We anticipate repairing or replacing the wooden rowboat every 15-20 years. The Historical Association of Lewiston will secure the necessary funds to insure that the Monument remains well preserved and a proud waterfront attraction for Lewiston.

Planning:	
Construction:	\$230,000
Acquisition:	
Administration:	
Operation and Maintenance / Year	
<b>TOTAL PROJECT COST:</b>	<b>\$230,000</b>
Sources of funding:	
Greenway Funds:	\$180,000
Private Funds:	\$ 50,000

## COMPARISON PRICING WITH SIMILAR BRONZE PROJECTS

After a considerable amount of comparison research of similar projects around the country, the Historical Association of Lewiston believes we are getting an excellent value for the dollars we have budgeted for this project.

Other communities have paid much more in the past for designs that are considerably less complicated than the proposed design we are advocating that includes 5 individual figures, along with a base and composite wood rowboat. Our budget also includes such things as landscaping and commemorative plaques.

With the price of copper near all time highs, the value of bronze has increased considerably in recent years. And yet, bronze remains the medium of choice when it comes to presenting a world class sculpture that will last for more than a thousand years.

In addition to the two comparison examples displayed on this page, we have other bronze sculptures we can share with those who are interested



This 12-foot high bronze monument of Martin Luther King, Jr. stands in front of the Westchester County, NY, Court House. It was constructed last year at a cost of \$500,000. Artist: Milton L. Sherrill.



in learning more about the cost of permanent memorials.

Located at the Museum of the Civil War Soldier in Petersburg, Virginia, this life-size bronze monument cost \$250,000 in 1999. Artist: Ron Tunison

## ARTIST EXPERIENCE AND CREDENTIALS

### Susan Geissler

What better way to celebrate Lewiston's heritage than to commission a local artist who grew up in Lewiston and has established a national reputation for her sculptures?

A graduate of Lewiston Porter, and Buffalo State College in Fine Arts, Susan Geissler began her art career in 1984 working as an anatomical illustrator, graphic designer and art history researcher. Since then, her work has delighted millions of people at around the nation at commercial centers, galleries and art events.

The scores of commissions, awards and prizes accorded her have contributed to her growing reputation and have stamped her as one of the premier designers of human figures in the United States. Most recently, she has been commissioned to create and construct a large bronze monument for a college in California.

Susan's gallery is located on Main Street in Youngstown, New York, and it has become an outpost of quality, integrity and love of the sculptural science. From this workplace, after intense research and anatomical study, several lovingly rendered pieces per year emerge -- some exploding with dazzling motion, while others rest quietly.

We are honored and fortunate that we have an opportunity to commission local talent to help us pay tribute to local history. We proudly present on the following pages Susan's resume, along with photographs of some of her bronze work.

Josiah Tryon would have been the last person to ever think that his hometown community would pay homage to the inspirational efforts he dedicated to the Underground Railroad. He would have been shocked to know that his memory would merit a monument over 120 years after his passing -- especially since what he did was done in secret.

And yet, we are confident that Mr. Tryon would be pleased to know that a fellow Lewistonian



was chosen to memorialize him because he worked diligently with his neighbors who all played a role in helping the oppressed find freedom

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## **OUR GENERATION'S LEGACY**

Few things will look the same in Niagara County in 1000 years.

Yet, the Freedom Crossing Monument will still stand tall as it echoes our proud and fascinating heritage for dozens of generations to come. This will be the one thing that our future citizens will look upon as a permanent marker in celebrating our 19th Century heritage.

This will become our generation's legacy and gift to the future -- it will be our 21st Century message that freedom -- even in a democracy -- can never be taken for granted and that whatever liberties are enjoyed by our descendants did not just magically appear. That freedom came at a price and the Underground Railroad was just one important example of how oppression was dealt with, even in a country that called itself "free."

We believe this project and Monument will provide the perfect venue for local citizens and visitors alike to learn and appreciate Niagara County's role in promoting freedom for all. But more importantly is the educational message the Monument will represent and convey -- that the scourge of slavery was not universally accepted in the United States, and despite the law of the land, thousands of Western New Yorkers, and Lewistonians in particular, put their lives and families at risk by helping to harbor and escort fugitive slaves to freedom.

Moreover, not only does this complement the burgeoning Niagara Greenway philosophy, but the Freedom Crossing Monument will also enhance other venues such as Niagara Falls and Fort Niagara.

We hope the Niagara County Host Committee will embrace this exciting project and look forward to working with you to create a "touch point to history" that will enhance Niagara County's image, reputation and role in our American heritage.