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Douglass conference closes with celebration

Social justice emphasized at three-day event

Erica Bryant
Staff writer

(October 1, 2007) — The three-day Frederick Douglass International Underground Railroad Conference ended with songs and stories in Susan B. Anthony Square Park on Sunday.

Hundreds of people participated in this "Freedom Festival," a celebration that included entertainment, music and food, with a lot of history mixed in.

About 3:30 p.m., Delores Jackson Radney took the stage as Harriet Jacobs, a woman who escaped slavery and had to hide in a relative's crawl space for seven years. Jacobs eventually made it to the North and wrote *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.

"The powerful message is that everyday people can do extraordinary things," said Jackson Radney, a Rochester resident. She was one of several people who came to the festival dressed as activists who fought slavery.

David Anderson, a conference organizer and chairman of the Rochester-Monroe County Freedom Trail Commission, took on the character of barber and abolitionist Jacob P. Morris. He said he was very pleased with the conference and its goal of keeping the spirit of the Underground Railroad alive. "The ranks of those who have firsthand knowledge of some of these freedom fighters are very thin," he said.

Steven Hobbs, a professor of law at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, attended all three days of the conference.

"I like the emphasis on the fact that this is not just an academic exercise," he said. "It's about promoting social activism."

After two days of workshops featuring leading authorities on the Underground Railroad, conference attendees settled in the park for performances by groups such as the Mount Olivet Church Choir and the Fiddlers of the Genesee. In between acts, attendees visited different booths, many of which promoted educational, social or political activities.

Eliud Rodriguez, a senior at Edison Tech's School of Imaging and Information Technology, manned a booth that offered information about a book about Douglass and Susan B. Anthony that Edison Tech will publish in April and distribute to third-graders in Monroe County. Interest in the project was high. "We had a whole stack of booklets," he said, pointing at his empty table. "They went quick."

The conference's Student Engagement Literacy Project booth offered information about a recent Underground Railroad tour. Over the summer, 135 young people from Rochester visited different stops on the Underground Railroad near Niagara Falls and Buffalo that were discussed in Margaret Goff Clark's historical novel, *Freedom Crossing*.

Melayka Brown-Cruz of Greece and Ashaya Williams of Rochester stopped by the booth that was promoting the upcoming Frederick Douglass Speech Arts Competition. The girls, who are both 10, plan to enter this contest, which is sponsored by the Friends of Frederick Douglass and the City School District. Of the festival, Ashaya said, "It's wonderful and fun."



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Nadine Earl-Carey of Rochester sings Sunday at the "Freedom Festival" that closed the three-day Frederick Douglass International Underground Railroad Conference. Organizers said they were pleased with the event's success.

Day in Photos



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Michelle Daniels and her son Eric, 6, of Rochester pose for a picture with a sculpture of Frederick Douglass on Sunday in Susan B. Anthony Square Park.

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