

Underground Railroad site recognized

BY SCOT ANDREW PITZER Times Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, May 4, 2011

Eighteen acres of land known as the McAllister's Mill site in Cumberland Township has been designated part of the National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom program.

The Baltimore Pike site is the first property in Adams County to officially receive the federal designation, according to park leaders.

"It enables us to tell an untold story," Gettysburg National Military Park Superintendent Bob Kirby said regarding the Underground Railroad, during a Tuesday morning announcement.

According to historians, the mill — now in ruins — sheltered hundreds of slaves from 1850-1855, along the banks of Rock Creek. as it was one of the first stops in Pennsylvania, across the Mason Dixon Line. The non-profit Historic Preservation Society of Gettysburg Adams County nominated the site for the federal Underground Railroad program, with President Curt Musselman reporting that the property is the "first site in Gettysburg ever to receive" the formal recognition.

There are 436 sites in the federal program, representing a collection of properties that have a verifiable association to the Underground Railroad.

"They don't always take it on the first application, we had a lot of extra work to do," said Musselman, adding that "when you go to these sites, they have a lot of integrity."

Even though the property remains privately-owned, public tours are now available of the property. The tours are available Saturday mornings at 11 a.m. from May to August.

"The property is really a diamond in the rough," said Musselman, as he walked a group of dignitaries and members of the media down a quarter-mile trail to the site.

The public is invited to park on south-end of the Mulligan MacDuffer's Adventure Golf parking lot, at 1360 Baltimore Pike, south of Gettysburg, on Saturdays through August. No reservation is necessary and there is no cost, although a \$10 donation is encouraged for adults, and a \$5 donation for children.

"It's always been closed to the public in the past, so this a great opportunity to experience new park landscape," said Kirby.

The property is located within the federally-designated boundaries of the 6,000-acre Gettysburg Battlefield, but is privately-owned. There are about 1,000 acres of land that are privately owned and subject to private development within the battlefield. Gettysburg National Military Park spokeswoman Katie Lawhon explained that the land is listed in the park's Land Protection Plan as a "high-priority for acquisition."

"In the long-term, we'd like to see reconstruction of the mill," said Musselman, noting that the building was destroyed in the late 1800s.

The property is located beside a Gettysburg Borough dump area, and Musselman said that he wasn't "sure about the long-term fate" regarding the dump. Similarly, Gettysburg Borough Council President

John Butterfield, who attended the tour and media briefing, also said he was unsure what would happen, noting that the borough has used the site as a dump area “for a number of years.”

The land sits six miles north of the Mason Dixon Line, and about 1.85 miles south of Gettysburg. Built in the late 18th century, the property was used for milling by James McAllister Jr., and his family also operated the mill as a safe house in support of the Underground Railroad, serving more than 200 runaways in the 1850s. Maryland was a slave state, so the mill, now in ruin, provided physical shelter to hundreds of freedom seekers. The peak years of the mill, per historians, was from 1850-1858.

During Tuesday’s tour and press briefing, local historian Debra McCauslin portrayed Elizabeth Sandoe Cromer, the sister of George Washington Sandoe, who was killed at McAllister Field near the mill, June 29, 1863, days before the Battle of Gettysburg.