



The Pearl Escape

A Milestone in America's Struggle from Slavery to Freedom

The Pearl Coalition

Education, Arts, Tourism and Social Enterprise
www.pearlcoalition.org

The Pearl Coalition

Education, Arts, Tourism and Social Enterprise



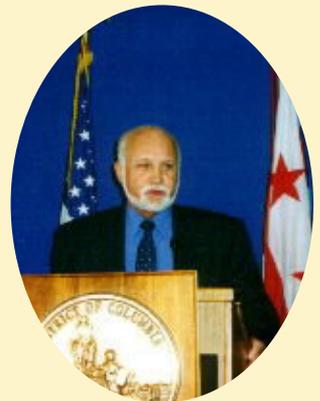
Mission

To educate the public about the heroic escape of seventy-seven African American Slaves and Freedmen from Washington, D.C. by rebuilding a replica of their ship, the Pearl schooner, as a floating museum. This historic event will be the centerpiece of cultural and educational programs that highlight the struggle for freedom from slavery and bondage in the Washington, D.C. area.

Founding Vision

Lloyd D. Smith's vision was to build a replica of the Pearl schooner as the centerpiece of cultural and educational programs that would reveal the hidden history of the Underground Railroad in the Washington, D.C. area. Mr. Smith believed that understanding the historical struggle for emancipation from slavery and bondage, which united people of all races and cultures, would inspire and strengthen our own communities today.

Mr. Smith envisioned having youth from the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area conduct the cultural and educational programs centering on the Pearl Escape. He believed that educating the younger generation about their history, and training them to lead the charge in sharing that knowledge, would instill in youth a sense of pride in the contribution of African Americans to the struggle for liberty, equality, and justice for all the people.



Founder Lloyd D. Smith



A Window into Our Past

On April 16, 1848 a bay schooner called the Pearl set sail from the southwest waterfront in the District of Columbia, carrying about seventy-seven enslaved African Americans on a secret mission to freedom. While the daring escape failed with the capture of the ship in the Chesapeake Bay, it was the largest documented slave escape and a milestone in the tortured road from slavery to freedom in the United States. This largely untold story has recently emerged and shines a spotlight into American history and our collective past.

The Pearl: Escape and Capture

February 1848

City of Washington

Paul Jennings, William Chaplin, and other members of the local Underground Railroad cell start planning the escape of two or three female slaves in danger of being sold far from home.



February 1848

Philadelphia

Charles Cleveland receives a letter from Washington asking him to engage a ship to carry escaped slaves to freedom through the Chesapeake Bay.



Painting by Tendani Mpulibusi with Pearl Coalition Youth Artist Participants, Contractor, and Arts Instructor.

March 25 1848

New York

Gerrit Smith, a wealthy anti-slavery New Yorker, receives a letter from William Chaplin informing him that the plot has expanded to 75 slaves.



April 13 1848

City of Washington

The Pearl docks at the Seventh Street Wharf on the Potomac River.



March 1848

Philadelphia

Daniel Drayton returns to Philadelphia to find a ship, after meeting with the organizers in Washington, D.C. He meets Edward Sayres, captain of the bay schooner Pearl.



April 15 1848

City of Washington

About 77 enslaved and indentured people board the Pearl in cover of darkness. The schooner is forced to dock overnight due to the lack of wind.



April 16 1848

City of Washington

At dawn, the Pearl catches the wind and sails towards the Chesapeake Bay. Later that morning, the slaves' owners discover the escape and engage the steamboat Salem to pursue the Pearl.



*Pearl Coalition Youth Artist:
Jimia Harris, age 20, Howard University.*

The Pearl sailed down the Potomac River to the Chesapeake Bay. Bad weather forced the ship to drop anchor in Cornfield Harbor.



Library of Congress

Seventh Street Wharf, Quartermaster's Office, circa 1865. The Pearl would have docked here.

April 17 1848
Chesapeake Bay

The steamboat Salem catches up with the Pearl and the fugitives are captured.



April 16 1848
Chesapeake Bay

Due to bad weather on the Chesapeake Bay, the Pearl seeks shelter in Cornfield Harbor, where the Potomac empties into the Bay.

April 18 1848
City of Washington

The Salem tows the Pearl back to Washington, D.C. The fugitives and crew are imprisoned in the D.C. Jail.



Library of Congress

VIEW OF THE INTERIOR OF THE JAIL IN WASHINGTON.—FANNY JACKSON

Exterior of D.C. Jail, shown in 1836 anti-slavery broadside.

The Pearl: Selected Key Players

Paul Jennings

New York Times



A key organizer of the Pearl Escape, Jennings did not board the ship. Born a slave of President James Madison, he later bought his freedom from Senator Daniel Webster.

Daniel Drayton

Library of Congress



A key organizer of the Pearl affair, Drayton stood trial, was imprisoned for four years, and was released when pardoned by President Millard Fillmore. Scarred by the experience, he later committed suicide.

Mary Edmonson

Library of Congress



Rented out as a housekeeper, Mary was seventeen when she boarded the Pearl. She was able to buy her freedom with the help of her family and other anti-slavery activists (one of whom was Frederick Douglass). In poor health since childhood, she died at the age of twenty.

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Library of Congress



Stowe was active in the anti-slavery movement and was instrumental in the emancipation and education of the Edmonson sisters. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was published just three years after the Pearl affair.

Emily Edmonson

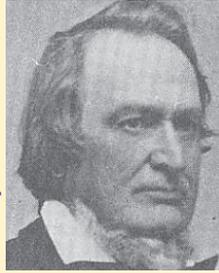


Emily was 15 when she boarded the Pearl with Mary. Later, the two sisters attended Oberlin College with the help of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Emily returned to Washington, D.C. to help Myrtila Miner establish a teacher's college for African-Americans, and was an important activist in the anti-slavery movement.

Americans of all races and sexes struggled together in a unified movement for emancipation from bondage and slavery.

Gerrit Smith

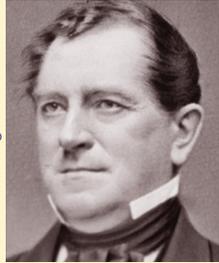
University of Missouri-Kansas City



Smith likely gave the money to charter the Pearl and her crew. He generously supported many anti-slavery efforts, including John Brown's raid on the federal arms depot at Harpers Ferry.

Joshua Giddings

Dickinson College

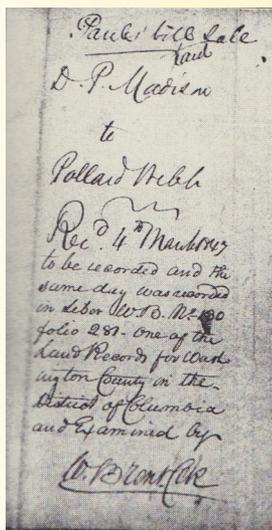


The United States Congressman from Ohio who was a leader in the anti-slavery movement, Giddings gave significant support to the Pearl fugitives after they were captured.

How Did the Law Treat the Pearl Fugitives?

When the Pearl fugitives were caught, the white crew was charged with theft and taken to trial, while the seventy-odd enslaved African-Americans were simply imprisoned. As “property” rather than citizens, they could not participate in the legal process.

1846 Bill of Sale by Dolly Madison, documenting the sale of Paul Jennings, an organizer of the Pearl Escape.



Escape on the Pearl, Mary Kay Ricks

Fifty of the Pearl fugitives were sold by their owners to a leading slave trader, Hope Slatter, for about \$1.5 million in today's money.

Painting by Pearl Coalition Youth Artist: Sierra Mimick, age 17.

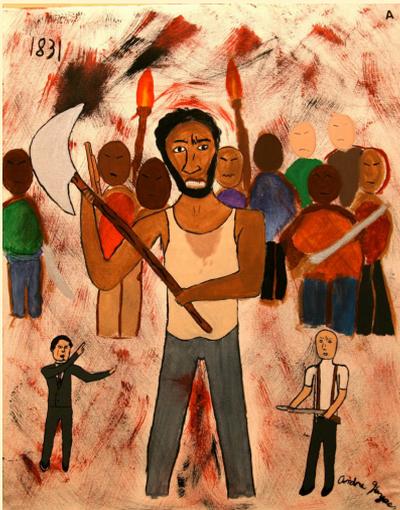


The Pearl fugitives could be punished in any way their owners wished. Even the Federal Government could not interfere, as the relationship between a slave owner and his or her slaves was protected under private property rights.

Why Such a Large Escape?

The Underground Railroad operated quite effectively in moving large numbers of enslaved people to freedom in small groups. Thomas Smallwood, a free African American, and Charles Torrey, who was white, were two of the key figures in the Underground Railroad cell in the nation's capital. Smallwood was later forced to escape to Canada to avoid arrest.

We can speculate on why the Pearl escape was unusually large. First, the water route offered greater secrecy and security than was possible overland. Second, the joyful celebrations in Washington, D.C. in support of the 1848 revolutions in Europe distracted the authorities.



*Painting by Pearl Coalition Youth
Artist: Andre Harper, age 18.*

This picture was inspired by Nat Turner's rebellion in southern Virginia in 1831. The rebellion strengthened pro-slavery forces in Washington, D.C. and temporarily slowed the abolitionist movement.

Additionally, once the Pearl escape was organized, greater numbers of enslaved people learned of the plot and wanted to participate. Like the Edmonson sisters, many slaves faced the fearsome prospect of being sold to work the expanding territories in the West and South.

The Pearl Escape was the largest documented slave escape in the U.S. and galvanized the abolitionist movement.

Why Did the Pearl Fugitives Risk So Much?



Painting by Pearl Coalition Youth Artist: Sierra Mimick, age 17.

The fact that slavery was legal in the United States in no way diminished its cruelty and injustice. Many slaves knew that while the law treated them as mere property, they were in fact human beings with dignity. They were willing to take risks to escape the intolerable conditions of slavery.

The mid-19th century posed particular dangers. The outlawing of the importation of slaves into the United States in 1808, and the increasing demand for slave labor in the cotton fields of the South spurred a “Second Great Migration,” where one million slaves were forced from the Upper South to the Lower South. The six Edmonson siblings, Mary Bell and her nine children, and most of the Pearl fugitives were in great danger of being torn from their families and sold in slave markets down South. Separation from their families was a powerful motive to take the enormous risk of escape.

Was Escape the Only Route to Freedom?

Legally, the only way to freedom was “manumission” or obtaining a certificate of freedom from the slave owner. Most slaves had to pay for manumission. Paul Jennings repaid his purchase price to Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts by working as his butler.

However, even manumission was no guarantee that free status would be legally recognized. Mary and Daniel Bell were both free, but the wife of their former owner challenged them. Daniel Bell took legal action to prove that his family members were free, but lost the case. That is why Mary Bell and her children boarded the Pearl to escape to freedom.

Slaves who did not have the money and connections to buy their freedom could only hope to escape to freedom illegally.

John and Elizabeth Brent. Elizabeth was one of the four older Edmonson siblings who were allowed to buy their freedom. The owner refused to allow the younger siblings to buy their way out of slavery.

Slavery in the United States:

Significant Events

1619 First slaves brought to North America

1787 US Constitution legitimizes slavery

1808 End of importation of slaves

The Pearl Escape

1850 Fugitive Slave Act & Compromise of 1850

1857 Dred Scott Case

1859 John Brown's Raid

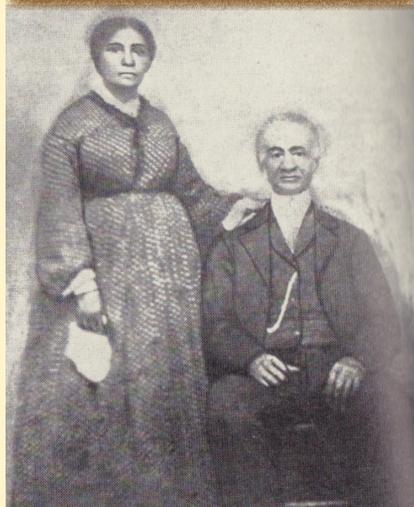
1861 Civil War begins

1863 Creation of US Colored Troops

1863 Emancipation Proclamation

1865 Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution

Escape on the Pearl, Mary Kay Ricks



Why Was the Pearl Escape Planned in the District of Columbia?

Slavery in Washington, D.C.: Significant Events

1790 Slavery established

1794 First Slave sold

1835 Snow Riot

1841 Solomon Northrop kidnapping

The Pearl Escape

1850 Public slave markets outlawed

1862 Compensated Emancipation; first public schools for African American children

1865 Freedmen's Bureau

As the nation's capital, the District of Columbia was uniquely significant to both sides of the Slavery issue.

Slavery was regarded as a matter of states rights, while the District of Columbia was -- and is -- a federal territory. The federal government had a unique responsibility for slavery in the capital. Also, while slave owners were powerful in the District of Columbia, there were also many abolitionist members of Congress and an anti-slavery newspaper.

The District of Columbia had slave pens. One belonged to William Williams and was within sight of the US Capitol. In 1841, Solomon Northrup, a free African American from New York was held there after being kidnapped. Northrup was enslaved for twelve years before he was freed. He later published a book recounting his horrific experience.



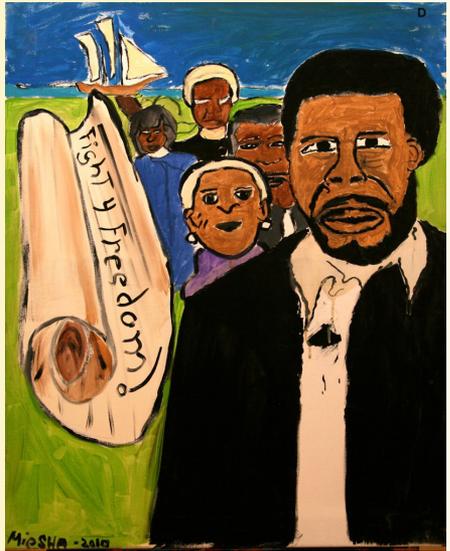
SCENE IN THE SLAVE PEN AT WASHINGTON.

Illustration of a Washington, D.C. slave pen from Solomon Northrup's 1855 book "Twelve Years a Slave."



Illustration of the women's department of the Washington jail, featured in Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1861.

*Painting by Pearl Coalition Youth
Artist: Miesha Mimmick, age 16.*



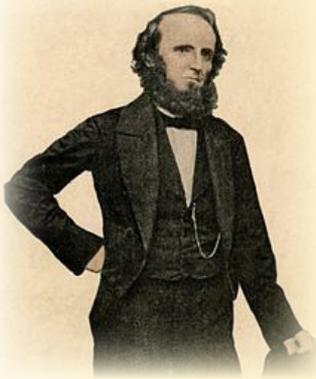
The Pearl fugitives and crew were imprisoned in the D.C. Jail, together with common criminals. Even free African Americans who could not show certificates of freedom were held in the jail and sold into slavery to pay the jail fees. Anti-slavery activists argued that Northern taxes should not be used to pay for public jails that housed runaway slaves.

“...the grandest event for the cause of Antislavery...”

William Chaplin, Washington correspondent for the Albany Patriot, regarding the Pearl Escape

How Did the Pearl Escape Energize the Anti-Slavery Movement?

The abolitionist newspapers turned the Pearl Escape into a public relations triumph that re-energized the anti-slavery movement. Two years later, the Compromise of 1850 outlawed slave markets in the District of Columbia. The open auctions that were conducted on Pennsylvania Avenue within view of the Capitol were shut down. Nevertheless, slavery continued to be legal, and the private sale of slaves continued.



wikipedia.com

Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the National Era, a leading national anti-slavery newspaper headquartered in Washington, D.C. The building, located on 7th & F Streets, NW, was attacked by a mob after the Pearl fugitives were caught.

Three years after the Pearl affair, Harriet Beecher Stowe began publishing Uncle Tom's Cabin in serial form in the Washington, D.C. newspaper, the National Era. The book galvanized the anti-slavery movement.

The case of Mary and Emily Edmonson was particularly powerful in mobilizing public opinion. Educate northerners were outraged to learn that young Christian women were being traded as property.

The Pearl affair also raised the stature of Joshua Giddings and other abolitionists in Congress, as well as the preacher Henry Ward Beecher.



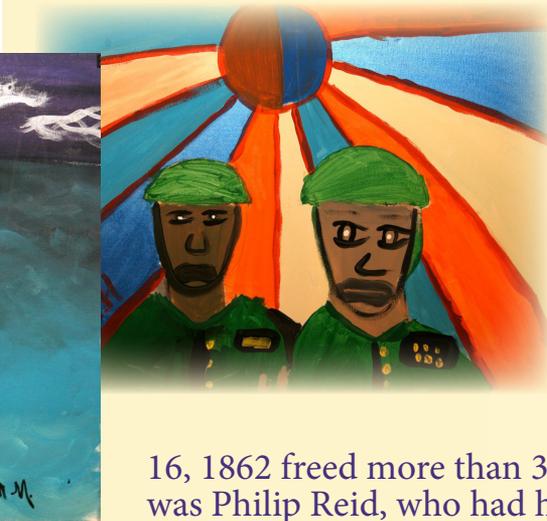
Painting by Pearl Coalition Youth Artist: Jimia Harris, age 20, Howard University.



Painting by Tendani Mpulibusi with Pearl Coalition Youth Artist Participants, Contractor, and Arts Instructor.

Events moved swiftly thereafter. John Brown raided the federal armory at Harpers Ferry in 1859, and a year later Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States. Southern states seceded from the Union and the Civil War began with the attack on Fort Sumter.

Painting by Pearl Coalition Youth Artist: Keon Herder, age 13.



The secession of the Southern states allowed Congress to outlaw slavery in the District of Columbia eight months before the Emancipation Proclamation.

Championed by Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, the D.C. Emancipation of April

16, 1862 freed more than 3,000 slaves. Among them was Philip Reid, who had helped cast the bronze Statue of Freedom on top of the U.S. Capitol dome while still a slave.

The Pearl Coalition: Education, Arts, Tourism and Social Enterprise



The Pearl Coalition is an educational and cultural institution offering programs that celebrate the Pearl Escape as a turning point in the movement for emancipation from slavery and bondage in the United States.

The Pearl Coalition uses a social enterprise model that invests in community development. Our programs develop the literary, artistic, research, and business skills of youth and adult participants. We also offer participants opportunities for profit-sharing enterprise.

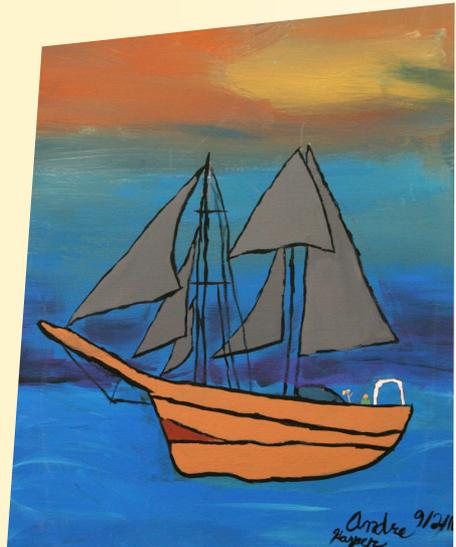
Visual & Media Arts Program

The Visual & Media Arts program engages youth participants to create art, poetry and film that document the building of the Pearl schooner and the history surrounding the Pearl escape.

Youth participants will participate in and document community events commemorating the history of the Underground Railroad and African American history. They will connect directly with descendants of participants in the Pearl escape, as well as with government officials of a similar rank to those officials who participated in the Pearl affair.

Youth participants will gain valuable training in the graphic design of printed and online promotional material. Additionally, participants will have the opportunity for profit-sharing through commissions for their artwork.

*Pearl Coalition Youth Artist:
Miesha Mimmick, age 16.*



*Painting by Pearl Coalition Youth Artist:
Andre Harper, age 18.*

The Pearl Coalition: Education, Arts, Tourism and Social Enterprise

Educational Voyages

A replica of the Pearl Schooner will be built to carry school groups and other youth on tours of the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers, offering a unique setting for learning the history of the Pearl escape and the anti-slavery movement.

Trained participants will engage students through literary competitions, public speaking events, theatrical performances and research workshops. After this voyage, students will never view history as boring again!

Historical Tourism

The Pearl Coalition (TPC) is partnering with Washington Tours and Transportation LLC (WTT) to offer guided historical tours to the general public. These educationally rich tours will highlight D.C.'s historical monuments and landmarks in the context of the Washington, D.C. area's unique contribution to the anti-slavery movement.

WTT will train and employ D.C. residents and youth as tour guides and drivers, while also offering a portion of tour sales to the Pearl Coalition's educational programs.

Social Enterprise

The Pearl Coalition (TPC) uses a Social Enterprise model that provides youth and adult participants with the opportunity to share in the profits gained through their work. Participants will receive training and opportunities to work directly with our social enterprise partners, Washington Tours and Transportation, LLC and 4GRUB Marketing LLC. Participants will be trained in entrepreneurial skills that allow them to augment hourly wages with profit-sharing.

Pearl Coalition Board & Staff

Matthew Cutts, Chairman
Dylan Glenn
Robert Nixon
Dr. Allen Counter
Maxwell Kennedy

Jarred C. Warrick
James T. Willie
Anthony T. Smith
Perlia D. Smith, MHS (Advisory Board)
Thom Wallace (Advisory Board)

Executive Director: David W. Smith, Sr.

Special Recognition to our Supporters & Contributors

Strauss Foundation • Joseph and Lynn Horning CFNCR
The Nixon Family • Asbury United Methodist Church

Supporters & Contributors

City First Bank • River Park Friends in Southwest Washington, D.C.
D.C. Commission on the Arts & Humanities • Neighborhood Investment Fund
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning & Economic Development • ERCPCP
Randle AME Church • Building Brighter Futures, Inc. • Idea Public Charter School
Burville Elementary School • Lloyd D. Smith Foundation • Eric Gordon
Far Northeast Corridor Weed and Seed • Captain Maxwell and Vicki Kennedy

Social Enterprise Partners

Washington Tours and Transportation LLC • www.washingtonhistorictors.com
4GRUB Marketing LLC • www.4grub.com

The Pearl Coalition was founded in 2001 by the late Lloyd D. Smith. The Pearl Coalition is incorporated under the District of Columbia Nonprofit Corporation Act and contributions are tax deductible. The Internal Revenue Service has recognized the Pearl Coalition as a 501(c) (3) corporation able to accept tax-deductible charitable contributions.

Support The Pearl Coalition's Social Enterprise Programming and Partnerships:

Visual & Media Arts Program

Get your piece of living history by making a donation that directly benefits our Youth Artists.



www.pearlcoalition.org

Take The Pearl Coalition Tour with Washington Tours and Transportation.



Get Your GRUB On!



www.4GRUB.com

promo code: *THEPEARL*

Special Thanks to Asbury United Methodist Church, and the Asbury Performing Arts Theater, 175th Anniversary Celebration Committee. (Background Poster Image designed by Asbury Performing Arts).
Booklet Graphic Design and Cover Art by Kesh Ladduwahetty.

The Pearl Coalition

Education, Arts, Tourism and Social Enterprise

www.pearlcoalition.org

(202) 345-3282