

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Michigan Freedom Trail Commission
2025 Report to the Governor and the Legislature
1998 Public Act 409, Section 5**

The Michigan Freedom Trail Commission (FTC or Commission) was established by Public Act 409 of 1998. Its first appointments were made in 2002. Since that time, it has worked to preserve, protect and promote the legacy of the Underground Railroad in Michigan.

The FTC had four meetings in 2025. Regional collaboration continued with commissioners recruiting interested individuals to join four committees. These committees are:

- Site Identification, Facilities and Programs
- Cultural and Heritage Tourism
- Heritage Gathering and Webinars
- Education

Volunteers participated in the work of the committees under the leadership of the commissioners.

In continued partnership with the University of Michigan, the FTC and the Michigan History Center hosted two summer interns, Lily Gerrits and Nadia McCoy. The interns each researched and wrote a nomination to the Network to Freedom. The two nominations were for the Woodstock Manual Labor Institute near Addison, Michigan and abolitionist activist, speaker, and editor Henry Bibb. Bibb spoke in counties across Michigan and is remembered in a historical marker in Flint. In addition to the nomination work, the interns were invited to several sessions focusing on work in public history.

The Education Committee of the FTC was awarded an \$8,400 grant from the Association for the Study of African American Life and History to host a teacher conference at Albion College in the summer of 2025. The conference focused on freedom seeker John White and people who helped him evade capture and return to slavery. Teachers experienced place-based learning and primary source documents within the context of the larger Michigan and national stories.

In September, the Commission hosted its ninth annual Heritage Gathering. The day-long, in-person conference was held at the Detroit Public Library. Sessions included:

- Remembering the Blackburns: Sharing the story of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn
- Breaking Laws to Gain Freedom: Creation of a community play featuring the Blackburns
- Base of Operations: Black Bottom as the center of Black abolitionist movement in Detroit

- Robert Cromwell Rescue: Retelling of Robert Cromwell escape from recapture
- Hamers: Hamer descendent shares family story from Royal Oak

Commissioner individual work included writing and reviewing articles for publication, lectures to community organizations and other activities promoting knowledge about the Underground Railroad in Michigan.