

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources  
Michigan Freedom Trail Commission  
2020 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 appointees were made in 2002. Since that time, it has worked to preserve, protect and promote the legacy of the Underground Railroad (UGRR) network in Michigan.

The FTC met quarterly in 2020. These meetings were held in Lansing at the Michigan History Center and virtually via Zoom. Regional collaboration continued with commissioners recruiting interested individuals to join four sub-committees. These subcommittees include:

- Site Identification, Facilities and Programs
- Cultural and Heritage Tourism
- Preservation and Support
- Education

Fifteen people volunteered to participate in the work of the sub-committees under the leadership of the commissioners.

In September, the Commission held the fourth annual Heritage Gathering, a conference featuring nationally known authors and speakers as well as workshops on various topics. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Commission moved the conference to an online format. The virtual format allowed the FTC to reach a broader audience and create sessions throughout the month. The conference held nine unique sessions with more than 400 attendees from across the United States and Canada and one attendee from Brazil. Session topics included:

- UGRR in Cass County
- Religious Motivations for the UGRR
- Researching the UGRR in Michigan
- Panel discussion of *The Fluid Frontier* book
- Methods for Teaching the UGRR
- Maryland UGRR Tourism Success
- Panel Discussion on African American History

Due to the success of the online opportunity, the Freedom Trail Commission plans to incorporate this option along with an in-person conference for 2021.

Between meetings, commissioners continued to work on research and educational materials. Their work included writing and reviewing articles for publication, lectures to community organizations, participation in panel discussions and other activities promoting the work of the Michigan Freedom Trail Commission.