

Unforgettable Forgottonia to Unveil New Underground Railroad Mural in Macomb, Honoring Local Role in Journey to Freedom

New mural at Macomb's Amtrak Station honors local Underground Railroad history and the bravery of freedom seekers and their supporters in the region.

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“

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Michael Mahoney, Artist

[Forgottonia](#) will unveil a powerful new mural inside the Thomas C. Carper Amtrak Station in Macomb, IL, commemorating McDonough County's role in the [Underground Railroad](#) on Thursday, November 6 at 10:00am. The new mural will be titled “Freedom's Trail: Underground Railroad in McDonough County”. This project is funded through a grant from the Looking for Lincoln Heritage Coalition, the coordinating entity for the National Park Service's Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area (ALNHA), which is a 43-county area of Central Illinois, designated by Congress in 2008, that works in partnership with the National Park Service. Matching funds are being

provided through continued research and narrative writing for the National Park Service's Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program, which recognizes and preserves documented sites, routes, and stories of the Underground Railroad.

The Network to Freedom Program honors and promotes the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, advancing the enduring idea that all people have the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression. McDonough County's documented Underground Railroad sites—including Station No. 3 of the Quincy Line—have already been recognized by the program thanks to ongoing research led by the MACVB with assistance from Elisha Szyjka, Dr. Timothy Roberts, Chair of the WIU History Department, and graduate assistant Abby Troxell-Skaggs.

The new mural, created by renowned local artist and Western Illinois University Professor Emeritus Michael Mahoney, will honor the stories of freedom seekers who passed through Western Illinois on their way to freedom in Canada. Known for his striking 70-foot mural of Civil

Rights leader C.T. Vivian, Mahoney will again bring history to life through a sweeping work of public art. According to artist Michael Mahoney, "Painting a mural to honor the courage of the men and women who braved terrible risks in their pursuit of freedom, as well as those in Western Illinois who aided in their flight, has been a weighty and meaningful undertaking and I am grateful and honored to have been given this opportunity."

The mural will be installed in Macomb's Amtrak station and feature imagery depicting freedom seekers' experiences in addition to that of local families—such as the Blazers and the Allison—whose homes served as safe havens for those escaping slavery. The local train station was chosen for the mural because one of the routes through McDonough County used a similar path as that of the actual railway, making it a powerful setting to tell this story.



Image of artist's sketch of a portion of the mural, which would later be painted in Macomb's Amtrak station.

Executive Director Jock Hedblade and Assistant Director Jan Armstrong of Visit Unforgettable Forgottonia, the Official Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Macomb and McDonough County, have been instrumental in establishing McDonough County's connection to the Underground Railroad and the journey of freedom seekers through the area. The office spearheaded the effort and oversaw the process of instituting the county's designation as a National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom area, as well as the commemoration of the sector as an Abraham Lincoln National Heritage Area. This history not only highlights the courage of local families who risked everything to help, but also gives today's visitors and residents a deeper understanding of the dangers freedom seekers faced on their journey through the Underground Railroad.

Jock Hedblade shared, "To be a part of telling the incredible story of these courageous freedom seekers and the area's families that helped facilitate their passage while underscoring the vital role that Forgottonia's McDonough County played in the cause has been both an honor and a humbling experience. We must thank our supporters at Looking For Lincoln and the City of Macomb, and of course Micheal Mahoney who we knew would bring the same combination of artistry, pathos and brilliance as he did on the C.T. Vivian mural on which we last partnered."

The mural unveiling marks another step in honoring the area's historical significance, highlighting the importance of preserving and sharing these stories across generations to come. Visitors can go to the Macomb Area Convention & Visitors Bureau, located inside the historic Macomb Railroad Depot, for a National Parks Passport Stamp for the Underground Railroad.

In addition to its rich Underground Railroad history, Macomb is also home to the Looking for Lincoln Self-Guided Tour, which features markers telling the story of Abraham Lincoln's connections to the region and efforts that led to the abolition of slavery in the nation.

For more information on Unforgettable Forgottonia and planning your visit to explore the area's rich Civil Rights History visit www.visitforgottonia.com.

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