

**Beczak Environmental Education Center**  
on the Hudson River at 35 Alexander Street, Yonkers, NY 10701  
(914) 377-1900, [www.beczak.org](http://www.beczak.org)

## HIGH RES PHOTOS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



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## **River to Freedom!** **The Hudson River's Role in the Underground Railroad** **Feb. 25 at Beczak Environmental Education Center**

*Discover the role the Hudson River played in the Underground Railroad and hear stories of those who used it to escape and assist others in gaining their freedom.*

Yonkers, N.Y. (January 30, 2012). Cordell Reaves, expert on the Underground Railroad with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreations, and Historic Preservation, presents **The Hudson River's Role in the Underground Railroad**. This [RiverTalks](#) event is **Saturday, February 25, 7:00 PM, \$10 / \$5 for teachers, students, and seniors**. For information contact [weekends@beczak.org](mailto:weekends@beczak.org), (914) 377-1900 x 13. Beczak Environmental Education Center, 35 Alexander Street, Yonkers, NY 10701. [www.beczak.org](http://www.beczak.org)

February is Black History Month. Learn a little known aspect of local African American history at **The Hudson River's Role in the Underground Railroad**, a presentation in pictures and stories with Cordell Reaves with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

The Underground Railroad was a network of secret routes and safe houses used by 19th-century black slaves in the United States to escape to free states and Canada. Fugitives from the Hudson Valley, New Jersey, Pennsylvania—as well as from the South—traveled through the lower New York State in big numbers. But how did they do it?

There is little evidence of escaped slaves traveling in the Hudson Valley after the 1830s. Compared to other areas—for example Central New York State, southern Pennsylvania, the Ohio River Valley, Detroit, the absence of records is deeply puzzling.

The answer, suggests Cordell Reaves—Underground Railroad specialist with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation—has to do with the Hudson River.

Something happened in the valley in 1807 that had nothing whatever to do with slavery—the first successful steamboat, Robert Fulton's *Clermont*. After that, the Hudson rapidly became the great Interstate Highway of its day—cheap and fast.

“Between New York City and Albany, the Underground Railroad used cargo sloops and steamboats, particularly those crewed or captained by African Americans,” says Reaves.

In **The Hudson River’s Role in the Underground Railroad**, Reaves presents fascinating stories of former slaves who used the Hudson River to escape as well as everyday people in the Hudson Valley who assisted others in gaining their freedom.

#### **About Cordell Reaves**

Cordell Reaves is a Historic Preservation Program Analyst with the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. For the past 10 years he has worked with historic sites across New York State to help them interpret and preserve their Underground Railroad History and increase their organizational capacity. Most recently he has been working on increasing tourism to NY using the story of the Underground Railroad. Cordell was born and raised in Brooklyn NY, has an MA from the Cooperstown Graduate Program for History Museum Studies and resides in Albany NY.

#### **RIVERTALKS—SMART CONVERSATION ABOUT THE HUDSON . . . AND A FREE DRINK!**

*RiverTalks* are lively Saturday evening discussions led by various experts in an historical, environmental or cultural aspect of the Hudson River Valley. Each evening includes refreshments, a featured presentation and discussion. Tickets \$10 / students, teachers and seniors \$5.

[RiverTalks](#) is a program of [Beczak Environmental Education Center](#) in partnership with [Yonkers Paddling and Rowing Club](#), a not-for-profit membership organization that encourages the growth of, and participation in, rowing and paddling sports, and the [Hudson River Watertrail Association](#), a coalition of small boaters, primarily human and wind powered, who are actively interested in the Hudson River as a treasure of natural and human history.

#### **HUDSON RIVER VALLEY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION INSTITUTE (HRVEEI)**

Hudson River Valley Environmental Education Institute, with classrooms and beach access in Yonkers, NY, and Sleepy Hollow, NY, is the lower Hudson's hub for river

education. It offers many programs that involve all ages in learning about nature and enjoying the outdoors. *Where you learn to love your river!*

HRVEEI staff work with approximately 20,000 children and families each year through river-based programming for students during the week and weekend public programs including *River Explorers* and *Fish Tales* for children, *RiverTalks* lectures and *Urban H<sub>2</sub>O* concerts for adults, *Lunchtime Learning* for seniors, *Summer Adventures* camp, and professional development for educators.

### **Beczak Environmental Education Center**

HRVEEI's flagship site is Beczak Environmental Education Center, located on the banks of the Hudson in the City of Yonkers. It celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of incorporation in 2010. This spacious interpretive center, named after Yonkers environmentalist Joe Beczak, is an adaptive reuse of the former social club for Habirshaw Cable & Wire Co. Its two-acre park features a welcoming riverfront lawn, an easily accessible tidal marsh and a beach used for river exploration.

### **Kathryn W. Davis RiverWalk Center**

HRVEEI offers river education at the Kathryn W. Davis RiverWalk Center in Sleepy Hollow, NY, which opened in 2011. Scenic Hudson spearheaded the renovation of the historic 1926 Kingsland Point Park bathhouse into a center for river-based education and recreation, named for philanthropist Kathryn W. Davis. This facility features a sandy beach used for river exploration and indoor/outdoor classroom space.

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