

Excerpts from an Application to the National Park Service's
Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program

January 13, 2006

Concord-Shreiner Cemetery Foundation

West Chestnut and North Mulberry Streets, Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Burial site of the Hon. Thaddeus Stevens (1792-1868).
U.S. Congressman, Attorney, Abolitionist & Underground Railroad Activist

Eulogy by the Rev. Dr. J. Isidor Mombert,
Rector of Saint James Episcopal Church, Lancaster, PA

The funeral of Thaddeus Stevens was held on Monday, August 17, 1868. ¹ An estimated 20,000 people lined the streets of Lancaster to witness the funeral procession and burial.

One newspaper reported the widespread uneasiness in the crowds as Steven's casket was accompanied to Concord Cemetery by a contingent of armed African American Zouaves. Writers noted that it was extremely unusual, some would say "unacceptable" to see armed Black men walking the streets of Lancaster.

But these were seasoned troops who stood in ceremonial watch over Stevens's body in the Rotunda of the U.S. Capital where his body lay in state, following his death on August 11. The Zouaves traveled aboard train to Lancaster with the Congressman's remains. Stevens' wake, like that of his close confidante, Lydia Hamilton Smith some 16 years later, was held in the modest home that still stands today on South Queen Street.



The Rev. Dr. J. Isidor Mombert, rector of Saint James Episcopal Church, Lancaster, delivered the eulogy. He stated, in part:

"Thaddeus Stevens loved liberty. The narrow barriers of party lines, of religious creed, of exclusive legislation, of a fettered press, of oligarchies aspiring to overthrow the liberties of the people by making the will of the many yield to the designs of a few, armed with official power and the resources and appliances of wealth – all these he hated with bitter hatred and opposed with all his powers..."

"This inborn love of liberty and abhorrence of all exclusiveness, made him actually select this retired spot for his burying place, for he refused even to allow his ashes to lie in a cemetery, which, unlike God's earth and air, forbids that those who are created with His image carved in ebony instead of ivory, should sleep there their last sleep."²

¹ - The Daily Evening Express, Lancaster, PA 8/18/1868. Page 1

² Worner, William Frederic, *Tombstone Inscriptions from Graveyards in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*, Volume 8, The Lancaster County Historical Society, 1941, Page 7.

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U.S. Congressman Thaddeus Stevens (1792-1868) was a pivotal figure in the public affairs of Pennsylvania and the nation from the 1820s through 1868, when he died in Washington D.C. As a state representative he championed free public education in the early 1830s. During two terms in the U.S. Congress, he was a member of the Whig Party (1849-53) and help found the Republican Party (1859-1868). An avowed Abolitionist and Constitutional scholar, Stevens played key roles in the passage of the 13th and 14th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. He also laid the groundwork for the 15th Amendment, enacted after his death. The "old Commoner" was one of the prime movers of Reconstruction and was the leading advocate for the Impeachment of President Andrew Johnson. Stevens was an Underground Railroad activist during his residency in Lancaster, PA (1842-1868).

Appropriately, the south face of Stevens's memorial in Lancaster is inscribed with the epitaph:

"I repose in this quiet and secluded spot, not for any natural preference for solitude. But finding other cemeteries limited as to race by charter rules, I have chosen this that I might illustrate in my death, the principles which I advocated through a long life. Equality of man before his creator."

Stevens's memorial – with its compelling epitaph - is the only existing physical remnant of Steven's life that is currently accessible to the public and which provides the visitor with a powerful outward testimony of his progressive quest for racial equality.

His home and law office in Gettysburg, PA have long been demolished, leaving no opportunity to fully interpret his legacy through a physical site in that community. While plans currently are underway to preserve and interpret Stevens's Lancaster home and law office as part of a public convention center, the future of the overall project is not certain at this time.

National level recognition of the burial site of "The Old Commoner" presents a critical opportunity to focus needed attention on this man, his memorial and its message.

Concord- Shreiner Cemetery is a contributing structure to the City of Lancaster National Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places September 7, 2001.

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