Strength Through Numbers

The Intersection of Abolitionist Politics, Freed Blacks, and a Flourishing Community in Quindaro

Symposium Report
Freedom’s Frontier national Heritage Area
2017-2018
Symposium Sponsors

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Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area (FFNHA) is dedicated to building awareness of the struggles for freedom in western Missouri and eastern Kansas. These diverse, interwoven, and nationally important stories grew from a unique physical and cultural landscape. FFNHA inspires respect for multiple perspectives and empowers residents to preserve and share these stories. We achieve our goals through interpretation, preservation, conservation, and education for all residents and visitors.
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On the Cover, top row, left to right: Dr. Nancy Dawson and Gayle Cade-Price; Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area Youth Programs and Camps Coordinator Lexi Ray checks Dr. Quintard Taylor in for the Quindaro Townsite bus tour.

Middle row: Dr. Quintard Taylor, screenshot C-SPAN video of the Keynote address at the Kansas City Public Library, www.c-span.org/video/?443918-1/slavery-reconstruction-west; symposium panelists.

Bottom row: ruins of the Quindaro Brewery, at Quindaro Townsite; Quindaro Overlook.

Unless otherwise indicated, photos used in this report taken by Jason Dailey Photo.
Quindaro Overview

Quindaro is a Kansas City, Kansas, neighborhood rooted in stories of the Delaware and Wyandot, suffragettes like Clarina Nichols, a free press, settlers and freed slaves. Its stories are about Free-staters and abolitionists, the Kansas-Nebraska and Fugitive Slave acts, and the Underground Railroad.

The townsite ruins, on the National Register of Historic Places, have for years faced an uncertain future. In the 1980s, a concerned community kept them from being sold for a landfill. Instead, archeological excavation recovered hundreds of artifacts, now at the Kansas Historical Society. Since then, grassroots advocates have strived to preserve Quindaro. Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area is working with Quindaro stakeholders to draw attention to Quindaro, and elevate its status to National Historic Landmark.

Quindaro townsite was purchased from the Wyandots in 1854, and flourished through 1858. In 1881, its school—one of the first in the new west for African American children—became Western University, one of the first black colleges west of the Mississippi River. It closed in 1943. The Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church ran the university, and still owns Quindaro Townsite, along with the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas (UG).

In 2017, Freedom’s Frontier received an $8,000 Kansas Humanities Council grant for a Quindaro Symposium, Strength Through Numbers: The Intersection of Abolitionist Politics, Freed Blacks and a Flourishing Community in Quindaro. Liz Hobson, Special Projects Coordinator, and Julie McPike, Managing Director of Freedom’s Frontier, served as project directors. Kelly Burns was hired as a Special Projects Coordinator to manage the symposium. Symposium sponsors provided transportation, lodging and meals for presenters, and kept the symposium and lunch free for about 150 attendees.

The symposium featured Dr. Quintard Taylor (BlackPast.org), University of Washington-Seattle, as the keynote speaker. C-SPAN recorded his speech to an audience of about 500 at Kansas City Public Library. The library will assist with creation of a Quindaro website. A slate of history professors and advocates presented papers about Quindaro. There are plans to compile the papers into a special publication of Kansas History. Kansas City, Kansas Public Library collected more than 40 oral histories at library programs and during the symposium that will be available for research through the library’s Kansas Room Collection.

On April 20, 2018, when greeting attendees at the symposium, Representative Kevin Yoder (R), Kansas 3rd District, pictured here, announced that he is sponsoring legislation to designate Quindaro Townsite a National Commemorative Site. In the month after the symposium, Yoder’s bill was co-sponsored by Representatives Emanuel Cleaver (D), 5th District, Missouri; Lacy Clay (D), 1st District Missouri; Roger Marshall (R), 1st District, Kansas; and Lynn Jenkins (R), 2nd District, Kansas. Senator Pat Roberts (R), Kansas, introduced companion legislation to the Yoder bill. The bill, HR passed the house on July 23.
An audience of 427 people attended Dr. Quintard Taylor’s (Scott and Dorothy Bullitt Professor of American History at the University of Washington – Seattle; BlackPast.org) keynote address at the Kansas City Public Library’s Central Library in downtown Kansas City, Missouri, on April 19, 2018. C-SPAN filmed the address. Dr. Taylor’s high school librarian attended.

Photos, clockwise from upper left: Crowd at the keynote address, courtesy of Dr. Jason Roe, Kansas City Public Library; Dr. Quintard Taylor; Virgie Brack Smith, librarian at Carver High School in Brownsville, Tennessee, in 1965; Reverend Stacy Evans, Director of the Western University Association of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Quindaro Ruins Project; Dr. Taylor taking audience questions.
The first day of the symposium began with a welcome greetings from Duane Benton, Chair, Freedom's Frontier National Heritage Area Board of Trustees; Luther Smith, Director, Quindaro Underground Railroad Museum, Freedom’s Frontier Board of Trustees; and Tracy Quillin, Associate Director, Humanities Kansas, Congressman Kevin Yoder, Kansas Third District, announced his intention to introduce legislation to designate Quindaro Townsite a National Historic Landmark.

There were about 150 attendees on each of the two days of the symposium, held at Memorial Hall, 600 N 7th Street Trafficway in downtown Kansas City, Kansas. Four sessions were held on Friday, followed by a documentary film, The Battle of Island Mound, introduced by Jim Rehard, Missouri State Parks Northern Missouri Historic District Supervisor, Battle of Island Mound, and then a performance by the Gum Springs Serenaders. An exhibit gallery was open to attendees throughout the symposium.

**Session I: Bleeding Kansas and a Nation Divided** – Moderator: Kristen Zane, P.E. Emeritus, Yarónya awi (Voice that Floats from the Sky), Bear Clan, Wyandot Nation of Kansas; Dr. Christopher Childers, Assistant Professor of History, Pittsburg State University, Squatter Sovereigns, Slaves and Serfs: Defining Popular Sovereignty in Kansas; Dr. Tai Edwards, Associate Professor of History Johnson County Community College, Emigrant Indians; John Nichols, Archivist for the Wyandot Nation of Kansas, Quindaro: A Safe Port in a Stormy Region, the Back Story

**Session II: Founding the Free State Port of Quindaro** – Moderator: Dr. Deanda Johnson, Midwest Regional Coordinator National Park Service, National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom; Dr. Nicole Etcheson, Ball State University, The Homestead of the Free: Freedom and Prosperity in Quindaro, Kansas; Larry Hancks, Kansas City, Kansas Planning and Zoning Department, Retired, Quindaro Territorial Townsite; Dr. Ian Munro, William Jewel College, Our Kansas Troy: Representations of Quindaro in Place and Time

**Featured speaker** – Dr. Robert Sutton, Former Chief Historian, National Park Service, Stark Mad Abolitionists: New Englanders Determined to Make Kansas a Free State

**Session III: Creating a Territorial Culture and Making an Impact** – Moderator: Dr. Diane Mutti Burke, University of Missouri-Kansas City; Dr Mark Lause, Professor of History, University of Cincinnati, Free Spirits; Keri Meinking, University of Kansas School of Journalism Graduate Student, Idealistic Kansas Territory Newspaper Editor J.M. Walden; Diane Eickhoff, Independent Scholar, with Aaron Barnhart, Quindaro Press, Clarina Nichols: Pioneering in Politics

**Session IV: The Promise of Freedom** – Moderator: Dr. Jason Roe, Kansas City Public Library; Dr. Diane Mutti Burke, University of Missouri-Kansas City, The Free State Beacon: Enslaved Missourians’ Journey to Freedom; LaDawndra Robbs, Educator and Researcher, History & African American Studies, St. Joseph School District, The Colored Soldier’s Story Quindaro, Kansas...” The Bundle of Sticks”; Paul Wenske, Independent Journalist and Principal in UCONNECTKC.Com, a news organization covering nonprofit, arts and history communities, Western University and the Music of Freedom
Photos, page 5, clockwise from top left: Dr. Christopher Childers, Dr. Tai Edwards, John Nichols, and Kristen Zane, presenters and moderator for Session I of the symposium, Bleeding Kansas and a Nation Divided; symposium participants with Marvin Robinson II; Diane Eickhoff, Keri Meinking, and Dr. Mark Lause, presenters for symposium Session III, Creating a Territorial Culture and Making an Impact; detail of the Weaving the River art installation; Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area Special Project Coordinator Kelly Burns; and symposium participant Diane Bratton.

Photos, this page, from top to bottom: the Gum Springs Serenaders; symposium participant John Sharp; Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area Executive Director Jim Ogle, with Chris Wenske who recorded the two-day symposium.
Photos, this page, from top to bottom: Kansas City Boys Choir and Kansas City Girls Choir; The Recipe Poetry Guild’s Desmond “337” Jones and Theodore “Priest” Hughes; Wyandot Nation of Kansas artifacts in the exhibit area.

Photos, page 9, clockwise from top left: Julie McPike, Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area Managing Director; Paul Wenske, Larry Hancks, Marvin Robinson II, Larry Schmits, Dr. Robert Hoard, and Fred Whitehead - panelists for the Archeological Significance of Quindaro Session; LaDawndra Robbs, Dr. Diane Mutti Burke, and Paul Wenske; a symposium participant looks through photographs in the exhibit area; Freedom’s Frontier Special Project Coordinator Kelly Burns hands a microphone to a symposium participant during a question and answer session; more symposium participants.
On the second day of the symposium, attendees were greeted by Kansas City, Kansas, Mayor David Alvey. There were two panel discussions that included time for questions and answers from the audience. The panels were followed by artistic, dramatic, and musical performances; community roundtable discussions, and closing remarks from Dr. James N. Leiker. Freedom’s Frontier Executive Director Jim Ogle thanked participants, and some attendees left for a tour of the Quindaro Townsite.

**Session V: Panel - Archeological Significance of Quindaro** – Moderator: Paul Wenske, Independent Journalist and Principal in UCONNECTKC.Com, a news organization covering nonprofit, arts and history communities; Larry Hancks, Kansas City, Kansas Planning and Zoning Department, Retired; Dr. Robert Hoard, Contract Archeology Program, Kansas Historical Society; Marvin Robinson II, Quindaro Ruins Underground Railroad – Exercise 2019, Independent Volunteer Researcher; Larry Schmits, Archeologist; Fred Whitehead, Retired Professor and Independent Historian

**Session VI: Panel – Preserving Our History: A Community Vision Discussion** – Moderator: Paul Wenske, Independent Journalist and Principal in UCONNECTKC.Com, a news organization covering nonprofit, arts and history communities; Doris Bailey, Board Member, Western University Association of the 5th Episcopal District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and a Past President of the 5th Episcopal District Lay Organization; Rachel Barnhart, Historic Preservation Specialist, Rosin Preservation, LLC; Rev. Stacy Evans, Director of the Western University Association of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Quindaro Ruins Project; Corranzo Lewis, Jr.; Lavert Murray; Rachel Nugent, National Register and Survey Coordinator, Rosin Preservation, LLC; Dr. Robert Sutton, Former Chief Historian, National Park Service; Holly Zane, J.D., Wak resatâhta (She Who Extends Her Paw), Bear Clan, Wyandot Nation of Kansas

**Kansas City Boys & Girls Choirs**

José Faus, Multi-faceted Artist, Kansas City, A Man Wants to Know; Introduction by Jen Appell, Musician, Artist, Activist, Weaving the River (Installation in Memorial Hall lobby)

The Recipe Poetry Guild – Theodore “Priest” Hughes and Desmond “337” Jones, Entertainers, Educators and Community Advocates, If we must Die by Claude McKay & The Letter by John Copeland; Introduction by Jen Appell, Musician, Artist, Activist, Weaving the River

**Summing Up and Take-Aways** – Dr. James N. Leiker, Chair, Department of History, Johnson County Community College; Closing Remarks: Five Lessons We Can Learn from Quindaro

**Special Performance** – Dr. Nancy Dawson, Artistic Director and Playwright for Music is Spirit; Gayle Cade-Price, Soprano, Performing with Dr. Dawson, Stories From da Dirt
Oral History Project

Freedom’s Frontier partnered with the Kansas City, Kansas Public Library to record oral histories of Quindaro. A Kansas Humanities Council grant assisted with the Quindaro Oral History Project.

The library believes this project is important because both the Quindaro Township and Quindaro neighborhood played vital roles in the history and development of this area. The library’s Kansas Room collection is focused on preserving the history of Kansas City, Kansas, and making resources available to all who are interested in learning about the city’s rich history. Oral histories hold a particularly important place in the collection as primary source accounts of people and families who lived – or live now – in Quindaro.

The Kansas Room already had 20 Quindaro interviews conducted by KU students and researchers in 1997 in the collection and the Quindaro Oral History Project serves as a wonderful extension of that.

In addition to collecting oral histories during the symposium, four sessions were held at the Main Library, 625 Minnesota Avenue, Kansas City, Kansas. Four other interviews were recorded via conference call, or outside of the scheduled oral history events. In all, 42 interviews have been collected since the project began in 2017.

The oral histories will be preserved at the library, and accessed in the Kansas Room. They are saved as MP3 files and the interviews are in the process of being transcribed as well.

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<th>Date</th>
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**Dr. Nancy Dawson**, Artistic Director and Playwright for Music is Spirit, a speaker and performer at the symposium, was interviewed during the April event. Dr. Dawson’s great grandmother, Elizabeth Thompson, was a runaway slave from Liberty, Missouri, who settled in Quindaro.
National Historic Landmark

On Saturday, May 13, 2017, the Kansas Historic Board of Review approved a $20,000 grant request to fund a project to elevate the Quindaro Townsite ruins to National Historic Landmark status. Freedom’s Frontier National Heritage Area (FFNHA) and the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, worked together to submit the grant application. The grant was awarded to the Unified Government, and administered by Freedom’s Frontier.

The funding was requested to pay for a consultant to complete the national historic landmark application. Freedom’s Frontier is working with the consultant, and oversees the project.

A designation as a National Historic Landmark would elevate the status of Quindaro, and would:

- turn the local significance of the Quindaro neighborhood to national significance.
- increase the scope of historical content.
- create more visibility for Quindaro and the surrounding region.
- increase funding opportunities for preservation of Quindaro.

Over the years, various groups have endeavored to preserve and interpret the stories of the Quindaro neighborhood with limited success. In 2002, the town’s ruins were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. National Historic Landmark is a rarer designation for historic places. Only 2,500 historic properties have been named National Historic Landmarks, and only 26 of the properties are in Kansas. They are designated as nationally significant historic places by the Secretary of the Interior, and the National Park Service, because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States.

In 2016, committees were formed that include representatives from a variety of organizations interested in preserving the history of Quindaro. The committees are exploring ways to step up the efforts to preserve this nationally historic site. In addition to working to have Quindaro named a National Historic Landmark, the committees have been working on gathering stories about Quindaro, and sharing those stories with the public. The committees are organized the Quindaro Symposium.

Quindaro’s ruins belong to the Allen Chapel AME Church and the City of Kansas City, Kansas, both of which are involved actively in the project to gain National Historic Landmark status for Quindaro. Pictured above are the ruins of the Quindaro Brewery.
The community and participants responded positively during the symposium:

- 96% of evaluation respondents agreed or strongly agreed that speakers, performers, and exhibits were informative, helpful, and enjoyable.
- Symposium received 96% positive feedback (Agree/Strongly Agree) to all evaluation questions.

Of those who responded to a question about the relevancy of the symposium:

- 100% felt the symposium was relevant to them.
- 94% felt motivated to take action.
- 100% want to tell others about what was presented.
Acknowledgments

Symposium Attendees
Symposium Presenters, Performers, and Exhibitors
Mayor David Alvey, Kansas City, Kansas
Balls Foods
Barton P. and Mary D. Cohen Charitable Trust
Judge Duane Benton, Chair, Freedom’s Frontier Board of Trustees
Kelly Burns, Freedom’s Frontier Special Projects Coordinator for Quindaro Symposium
First Student
Freedom’s Frontier Staff
Anthony Hope, Old Quindaro Museum
Humanities Kansas
Jason Dailey Photography
Johnson County Community College, Kansas Studies Institute
Kansas City Kansas Community College
Kansas City Kansas Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc.
Kansas City, Kansas Public Library
Kansas City Public Library
Kansas State Historical Society
Missouri Humanities Council
National Park Service
Tracie Quillin, Humanities Kansas
Luther Smith, Vernon Center/Quindaro Underground Railroad Museum, Freedom’s Frontier Trustee
Quindaro Elementary
Dr. Quintard Taylor, University of Washington – Seattle, and BlackPast.org
Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas & Memorial Hall Staff
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  • The Center for Midwestern Studies
  • Student Volunteers
Weaving the River
Chris Wenske, A/V support and Videography
Paul Wenske, Symposium Moderator
Fred Whitehead
Wyandot Nation of Kansas
Representative Kevin Yoder, (R-Kansas, 3rd District)