

Bridge highlights Tubman's heroism

By BRANDON HONIG
The Beaufort Gazette

Gullah slaves used to sing, "Swing low, sweet Harriet," hoping Harriet Tubman would come to the Lowcountry and carry them to freedom. She answered that call on June 2, 1863, leading 300 black Union soldiers up the Combahee River to raid several plantations.

Tubman is best known as a conductor on the Underground Railroad; even before the Combahee raid, she had helped about 300 slaves, many from her home state of Maryland, escape to the North.

But it is Tubman's contribution to Beaufort and Colleton counties that prompted state Rep. Kenneth F. Hodges, D-Bennetts Point, to introduce legislation, which passed in February, requesting that the new U.S. 17 bridge over the Combahee River be named The Harriet Tubman Bridge.

"(Tubman) served as a spy in this region for nearly three years, and the Combahee River raid is one of the great historic feats of the Civil War," Hodges said. "Hopefully (the bridge) will serve as a means of inspiring more research on Harriet Tubman and ... promote and increase historic tourism in the area."

Hodges brought one Tubman researcher, Asa Gordon, to Beaufort last week to give a lecture at LyBenson's Art Gallery about Tubman's impact on the Lowcountry. Hodges owns LyBenson's, which specializes in African and Gullah art.

Gordon, founder of the Washington-based Douglass Institute of Government, said records regarding Tubman's time in South Carolina are sparse, likely because of the nature of her espionage work as well as racists' attempts to minimize her accomplishments.

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Tubman

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Four months ago, Gordon finally found a record in the National Archives that he said proves Tubman worked as a spy. The document, sent to Department of the South headquarters in January 1863, instructed that Tubman be paid \$100 in Secret Service money. It's the only document Gordon has seen that specifically mentions Tubman's work in Secret Service.

Six months after that document was written, Tubman safely guided Union ships up the Combahee River, using tips from her spies and scouts to avoid remotely detonated mines Confederates had placed in the river. The soldiers reached shore undetected, then freed more than 750 slaves and destroyed a Confederate supply depot, plantation homes and warehouses.

At least nine plantations were impacted by loss of property or slaves that night, according to Gordon, and the loss of supplies affected many Confederate troops. The raid would not have been possible without Tubman.

"This is the only military command in American history wherein a woman, black or white, led the raid and under whose inspiration it was originated and conducted," Brig. Gen. Rufus Saxton told the Secretary of War following the mission, according to the CIA's Web site.

The raid was launched near a pontoon bridge over the causeway. Hodges said, and historians believe that bridge was at the future site of The Harriet Tubman Bridge.



MIKE GISICK/GAZETTE

State Rep. Kenneth Hodges, left, D-Bennetts Point, Asa Gordon and Ben Mathis discuss the Combahee River Raid that freed more than 700 slaves in 1863. Hodges has introduced legislation to name the Combahee River Bridge, background, after Harriet Tubman, who is believed to have participated in the raid. A project to widen the bridge could be completed by May 2007.

"(The bridge) is going to be a big attention-getter and a big stimulus for us to learn more and for kids to learn more about the activities of Harriet Tubman and others around that period," said Emory Campbell, former executive director of Penn Center, an African-American historical and cultural institution on St. Helena Island. "I don't think Harriet Tubman has been recognized (enough) in this area."

Campbell said there had always been talk about Tubman's contributions to the region, but there was no documentation of her time here. As more facts are discovered, people's appreciation for Tubman's accomplishments will grow.

"Like Robert Smalls, Harriet Tubman was not very well embraced by the South until

now," Campbell said, "(because) now we are more enlightened about the history of the nation and we are learning both sides."

Penn Center is planning programs throughout next year that will focus on Tubman, who spent time living and working at the former school for freed slaves.

The Harriet Tubman Bridge was scheduled for completion in 2008, but Hodges said he believes it could be finished by spring. If the bridge is completed in time, a dedication will take place June 2, the anniversary of Tubman's Combahee raid.

►Contact Brandon Honig at 986-5532 or bhonig@beaufortgazette.com. To comment: beaufortgazette.com.

Harriet Tubman

- Tubman was born into slavery in 1819 or 1820.
- At age 25, she escaped through the Underground Railroad and settled in Pennsylvania. It was here that she began to move family members through the Underground Railroad to Canada.
- Tubman helped approximately 300 persons escape to freedom in the North.
- During the Civil War, Tubman served as a soldier, spy and a nurse.
- Tubman died in 1913 and was buried in Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, N.Y. with military honors.



SOURCE: NEW YORK HISTORY INT.



Mike Gisick/Gazette

State Rep. Kenneth Hodges, left, D-Bennetts Point, Asa Gordon and Ben Mathis discuss the Combahee River Raid that freed more than 700 slaves in 1863. Hodges has introduced legislation to name the Combahee River Bridge, background, after Harriet Tubman, who is believed to have participated in the raid. A project to widen the bridge could be completed by May 2007.

Asa Gordon Unearths The Whole Truth About “Moses”



[Read Full Story Here](#)

Derrell J. Chandler

Two forces for good converged on Tuesday, August 29, 2006 to help make the Beaufort community aware of the richness of their history at the LY Bensons Gallery & Studio, located at 211 Charles Street. One was Kenneth Hodges, pastor of Faith Tabernacle and State Representative of District 121; the other, Asa Gordon, historian, researcher, and the Secretary General of the “Sons & Daughter of the United States Colored Troops”.

Today we learned that with only seventeen days in office, Representative Hodges was able to get a resolution passed to honor Harriet Tubman’s contribution to the winning of the Civil War and her extraordinary work as the “Moses” of the enslaved humanity of the South before and during the war. The resolution dated February 16, 2006, promises to name the new bridge being built across the Combahee River along US highway 17 in Colleton County, “The Harriet Tubman Bridge”.

A celebration is planned for June 2nd, 2007 to commemorate the raid on the Heywood Plantation in which Harriet Tubman freed over 700 slaves, many of whom went on to join the United States Colored Troops. It is reported that at one time Harriet Tubman had at least 300 soldiers under her command during this period of “guerrilla warfare”.

...

Asa Gordon presented this and other clear, undeniable evidence that Harriet Tubman Davis was not only a nurse, guide, cook, navigator and scout during the Civil War she was indeed a well paid spy, recruiter and abolitionist as well. The evidence came from a receipt found in the National Archives awarding her \$100.00 “Secret Service” compensation from the United States (Jan. 7th, 1863).

The Press and Standard

Serving Colleton County, S.C., since 1877 - Friday, September 1, 2006

New Combahee bridge named for Tubman

By HEATHER STONER
Associate Editor

You can just about picture it: hundreds of slaves standing bent over in a water-soaked rice field, singing the old gospel hymn, "Swing low, sweet chariot." When the master wasn't close, the slaves would change the song's words to "Swing low, sweet Harriet."

This was their hopeful call to Harriet Tubman, leader of the Underground Railroad that freed thousands of slaves during the Civil War.

Tubman led the largest raid of her rebellious career on June 2, 1863 when she and a force of Union Abolitionists freed at least 700 slaves from Colleton and Beaufort county plantations, according to Ace Gordon, executive director of the Douglas Institute in Washington, D.C.

Tubman was referred to as "Moses" by the *Boston Commonwealth* in an 1863 news article that talked about her freeing slaves. Tubman was also a scout for the Union armies, and was referred to by them as a "General," Gordon said.



Photo by HEATHER STONER

PRAISE FOR TUBMAN. Ace Gordon, executive director of the Douglas Institute in Washington, D.C., educates people about the important role that Tubman played in Lowcountry history.

Gordon told groups of Colleton and Beaufort leaders

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Tubman

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about Tubman's important and intricate role in Lowcountry history on Tuesday when the bridge over the Combahee River was named the Harriet Tubman Bridge. Rep. Kenneth Hodges (D-Bennetts Point) introduced the legislation in February of this year to rename the bridge.

"It's something I wanted to do for Colleton and Beaufort counties," Hodges said. "This is a very important part of our history that not a lot of people know about."

The "Yankee Raid," as Civil War era Charleston newspapers called it, burned the bridge at Combahee Ferry and left several Lowcountry plantations in ruins. Two of those burned plantations belonged to wealthy Colleton landowners W.C. Heyward and C.T. Lowndes.

The *Mercury Newspaper* of Charleston reported in an 1863 article that two slaves from the Heyward plantation escaped two weeks before the raid, and are believed to have helped the Union boats navigate their way onto the rice plantations through the waterways.

These slaves were called "pilots" because they knew the waterways so well, Gordon explained.

"More slaves were freed in this raid led by Tubman than her whole time working the Underground Railroad," said Gordon. "This raid had a significant impact well beyond the actual raid." According to him, the raid destroyed the rice plantations that fed the South — and its armies.

"A hungry army doesn't fight well," he said.

Tubman's raids in Colleton County were compiled by Gordon and Green Pond resident Jeff Griggs, who has been actively trying to preserve pieces of the county's history that lie along U.S. Highway 17. Griggs' work has also helped to save

ruins of the Temple of the Sport, a pre-Revolutionary War hunters lodge. "He has been a huge help," Hodges said of Griggs.

The Combahee Bridge is now under construction, but Hodges said the Department of Transportation expects the \$13 million project to be completed by 2008.

The new bridge will be called the Harriet Tubman Bridge on both the Colleton and Beaufort sides of the river, he said.

GULLAH FESTIVAL 1998
May 20 - 24

PRE-FESTIVAL EVENTS

Wednesday, May 20, 1998 – Tabernacle Baptist Church

One day conference for community activists, utility experts and all consumers.

9:00 a.m.-12:00 noon "Restructuring the Electric Industry:
What is the Impact?"

12:00-2:00 BREAK

2:00-5:00 p.m. "The Effect of Mandatory Electronic Funds Transfer
(EFT) on Consumers"

Consultants: Florence M. Rice, Coordinator
Harlem Consumer Education Council, Inc.
New York City, New York
Dorothy Garrick, Representative
National African American Consumer Education Org.
Columbia, South Carolina
South Carolina Electric & Gas
TBA

Educational materials on insurance, drug abuse, privacy and housing will be available.

FESTIVAL'S THEME: *Voices From The Motherland: Gullah!!*

**GULLAH STORIES COME IN MANY FORMS. OPENING DAY CELEBRATIONS
FOR GULLAH FESTIVAL, 1998 WILL FEATURE STORIES BY ELDERS AND
CHILDREN. THE STORIES WILL BE TOLD IN WORDS, DEEDS AND SONG.**

Thursday, May 21, 1998



11:00 a.m. Workshop: "Swing Low, Sweet Harriet," Cont'd
12:30 p.m. (Researching Harriet Tubman's Legacy Among the Gullahs in the
Beaufort, S.C. Region)
Dr. Asa Gordon, Douglass Institute of Government,
Washington, D.C.
Tabernacle Baptist Church, Craven Street
2:00p.m. Workshop: Spirituals Among the Gullahs in the Sea Islands
3:30 p.m. Dr. Arthur Evans, Choir Director and Chair,
Music Department, S.C. State University
Prof. Lameriel Ridges, Assistant; S.C. State University
Students
Tabernacle Baptist Church, Craven Street
4:00 p.m. "Little Stories" Workshop (Young Warriors and the Elders)
5:30 p.m. Sea Island Sisters
Grand Army Hall, New Castle Street
7:00 p.m. "Gullah Stories: Sense of Community and Song"
(Part I: Stories in Pictures, in Words and in Songs about Beaufort Town
on Port Royal Island, Lady's Island and others)

OPENING CEREMONY with CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

Male Chorus from Tabernacle Baptist & other churches
Delo E. Washington, Ph.D. (California State University Stanislaus &
Beaufort)
Ms. Laretta Pazant (Beaufort) "Remember 'We? Beaufort Blacks 1800's
to 1950's: Stories in Pictures and Words"
Alpha Bah, Ph.D. (College of Charleston) "What's in a Name? The
Liberian and African Connection in Beaufort Town"
Beverly M. John, Ph.D. (Hampton University) "Gullah Culture in
Beaufort Town"
Rev. Reuben A. Greene, (Burton, S.C.) "The Old Time Beaufort Area
Preacher's Voice"
Ms. Margaret Simmons, (Brooklyn, N.Y. and Beaufort)
"Songs and Singers Remembered"

BREAK – Questions, Answers or Responses

**PART II: THE LECTURE IN SONG: GULLAH SOUNDS IN THE SEA ISLANDS - A
LEGACY OF SONGS FROM THE 18TH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT"**
Dr. Arthur Evans and the S.C. State U. Concert Chorale,

THE BEAUFORT GAZETTE

25¢

BEAUFORT • SOUTH CAROLINA

Authority ready for faster water rights fight

Tubman's Lowcountry role focus of lecture

By THERESA WHITE
Gazette staff writer

Harriet Tubman, famous conductor of the Underground Railroad, also played a largely unheralded role in the Civil War in the Lowcountry, according to a Gullah Festival lecturer.

Tubman a masterminded daring raid on rice plantations in the Ace River basin, said Asa Gordon, founder and executive director of the Douglass Institute of Government, a research and policy studies think-tank in Washington, D.C.

Gordon's lecture, "Swing Low, Sweet Harriet," recalled how Tubman's uncanny "methods and stealth," used to smuggle slaves to freedom in the North, were later turned against the Confederacy by Union Army Col. James Montgomery, a die-hard abolitionist.

Tubman's role as a Union Army spy and scout was downplayed in the southern media, Gordon said during his lecture to a bi-racial audience at Beaufort's Tabernacle Baptist Church. But it made headlines in northern abolitionist-backed newspapers, he said.

During the "abolitionist raid" of plantations between the Combahee and Edisto rivers a "low estimate" of \$10 million in plantation property was burned, flooded, destroyed or stolen by almost 800 escaping slaves and free black troops in June 1863, according to contemporary newspaper accounts cited by Gordon.

Loss of the rice crops at the burned plantations could have "made the difference" in battles like Gettysburg and Vicksburg and had "a domino effect" on the rest of the South's military efforts "because an Army marches on its stomach," Gordon said.

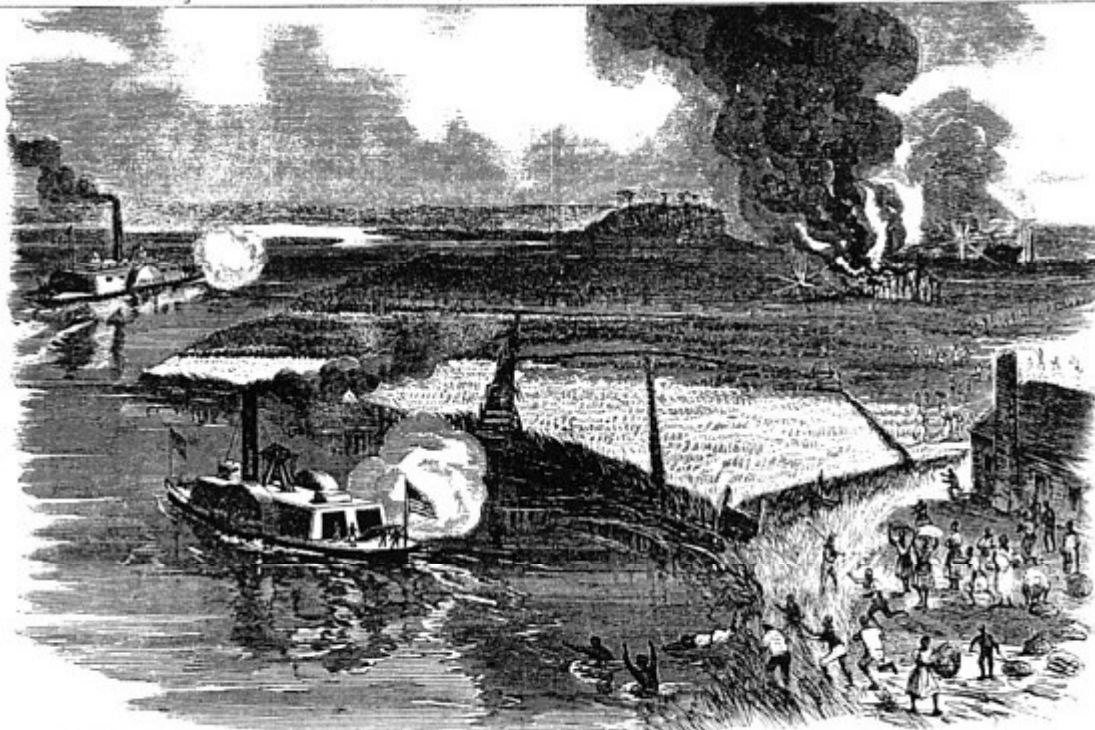
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Raid of Second South Carolina Volunteers (Col. Montgomery) among the Rice Plantations on the Combahee, S.C. ...427

Testimonials for Harriet Tubman.

Atlanta, Ga March 21, 1868

My Dear Madame:

I have just received your letter informing me that Hon. Wm. H. Seward, Secretary of State, would present a petition to Congress for a pension to Harriet Tubman, for services rendered in the Union Army during the late war. I can bear witness to the value of her services in South Carolina and Florida. She was employed in the hospitals and as a spy. She made many a raid inside the enemy's lines, displaying remarkable courage, zeal and fidelity. She was employed by General Hunter, and I think by Generals Stevens and Sherman, and is as deserving of a pension from the Government for her services as any other of its faithful servants,

I am very truly yours,

Rufus Saxton, Bvt. Brig.-Gen., U.S.A.

St. Helena Island, S.C. July 6, 1863

Headquarters Colored Brigade.

BRJG.-GEN. GILMORE, COMMANDING DEPARTMENT OF THE SOUTH-

General:

I wish to commend to your attention, Mrs. Harriet Tubman, a most remarkable woman, and invaluable as a scout. I have been acquainted with her character and actions for several years.

I am, General, your most ob't servant,

James Montgomery, Col. Com. Brigade

Headquarters Department of the South,
Hilton Head, Port Royal, S.C. Feb. 19, 1863

Pass the bearer, Harriet Tubman, to Beaufort and back to this place, and wherever she wishes to go; and give her free passage at all times, on all Government transports, Harriet was sent to me from Boston by Governor Andrew of Massachusetts, and is a valuable woman. She has permission, as a servant of the Government, to purchase such provisions from the Commissary as she may need.

D. Hunter, Maj.-Gen. Com.

War Department, Washington, D.C.
March 20, 1865

Pass Mrs. Harriet Tubman to Hilton Head and Charleston, S.C. with free transportation on a Government transport, By order of the Sec. of War.

Louis H. Pelonge, Asst. Adj.-Gen., U.S.A.

To Bvt. Brig.-Gen. Van Vliet, U.S. Q.M., N.Y.