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### Liberty Passage, Handwritten Intro, n.d.

Lillion Batchelor

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# LIBERTY PASSAGE

## INTRO

This city, "the Queen of the Great Lakes" sits at the edge of two great nations. The world's longest peaceful border has not staunched the flow of people and ideas. There was a time, however, that this permeable division was the pathway to freedom for some of our inhabitants.

During Slavery days the unquenchable taste for freedom emboldened African Americans to start the long journey northward. They were aided and abetted by Abolitionists and others who knew that to "own" another was morally reprehensible. Many made the dash to the "free" states who had outlawed slavery. When President ~~McKinley~~ <sup>Filmore</sup> (Buffalo's own) signed into law the Fugitive Slave Act it was no longer safe to reside in free states because according

to the logic of the law slaves were property and had to be returned to their owners. Now the slaves had to escape the country and live in a land without slavery.

Canada is a relatively short but dangerous boat ride away from Buffalo became the destination and relief. This city became the locus of activity to "ferry" the slaves to freedom.

The Underground Railroad which was neither underground nor a railroad was dangerous and illegal. You were courting danger to either be a refugee or help them. Because of the threat of the law most of what we have in terms of documentation is apocryphal. The names were changed to protect the people fleeing, the signs and signposts were subtle and ephemeral.

The most concrete and poignant evidence we have resides in the "Coloured Persons Cemetery" just over the border in the small town of Fort Erie. There you can study the gravestones and using some arithmetic you can ascertain who had been slaves.

Tales of houses with hidley holes to protect the human cargo abound in this area. Our Michigan Avenue Baptist Church still stands with its camouflaged room.

Buffalo should be proud of its history in this covert movement to protect the life and liberty of those righteous rebels.

Nelson e'tre

Our goal is to keep this history and its lessons alive and part of the cultural literacy of our population.

Riverside Institute of Technology is a Buffalo Public High School situated right alongside that one wide river to cross. Our students are from widely diverse backgrounds and neighborhoods. To celebrate these acts of cooperation between the races can only help to serve our mission of tolerance and understanding. We will be working with the most logical partner the Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society. Their research library will be an invaluable asset and their site a wonderful host for exhibition of the students' artwork on the topics. They will mount an exhibition on "The Road to Freedom" in our school library. Their educational kits and materials will be invaluable to student studies.

Project (end product)

During the '06-'07 school year

the Art students at Riverside  
<sup>Institute of Technology</sup>  
will focus on Buffalo and its  
History for its artmaking inspiration.

Within this cultural lens there  
will be an in-depth focus on  
the Underground Railroad.

Students will produce a  
variety of projects that will  
be presented to the wider  
community through an exhibition  
at the ~~Rochester~~ Historical  
Society ~~building~~.

To make the experience  
more palpable the students will

visit the sites of the  
Railroad. Standing by the  
edge of the Niagara River  
with its speeding waters  
will impress them with the  
courage of those who crossed  
it and sympathy for those  
whose bones ~~who~~ went to the  
bottom.

To provide a lasting  
memorial to this incredible  
American experience students  
will design memorials commemorating  
the Underground Railroad to be

installed in the <sup>gardens surrounding</sup> McKinley  
Monument ~~which stands~~  
if in front of City Hall.  
Community organizations <sup>such as</sup>  
"Uncrowned Queens", and  
"Motherland Connections" will  
be invited to become involved  
in this endeavor.