

Underground Railroad Museum coming together in York City

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Visitors to the York City home of a prominent 19th-century black businessman will soon be able to peer into the hidden cellar where runaway slaves hid on their way to freedom.

The site is the future William C. Goodridge Freedom House and Underground Railroad Museum, a project of community organization Crispus Attucks. Though the front of the house at 123 E. Philadelphia St. has already been renovated, plans to restore the first floor are just coming together, said Carol Kauffman, Crispus Attucks community development director.

Goodridge was an ex-slave who became a prominent York businessman in the 19th century and who helped escaping slaves along the Underground Railroad. His sons became prominent photographers.

A peek into his home will give visitors a glimpse of what it may have looked like more than a century ago. The first floor will include exhibits on the Goodridge family and York's black history, Kauffman said.

Though the public won't be allowed down the steep staircase into the hidden chamber where slaves could hide, a thick glass ceiling will give visitors a look in from the kitchen above, Kauffman said.

Could be from 1820s: The home was standing by 1840 and may date from the 1820s, said Scott Butcher, who is working on the renovations as director of business development at NuTec Design Associates Inc.

Though the Goodridge family lived in the home only until 1859 or 1860, Butcher said the house will be restored to look as it might have around 1900 -- when an embellished front facade, interior columns and numerous fireplaces were put in during a renovation designed by prominent architect Reinhardt Dempwolf.

Work will get under way as soon as building permits are granted, and the first floor could be open to the public by May, Kauffman said.

Once the museum is open, costumed guides will draw people into the time period, Kauffman said.

City council member Wm. Lee Smallwood will play Goodridge, and others will act as people who would have interacted with him during his day, like a farmer who sells him merchandise or a Quaker abolitionist who works with him to free slaves.

The project is being paid for out of a number of funding sources, including state grants and private donations, Kauffman said. She did not have details on the project's cost available; final construction bids have not yet come in.

Renovation of the building's second floor, which will include rotating exhibits, will take place later, Kauffman said. A timeline depends on when funding is available.

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