

## Aquia Landing designated to 'Network to Freedom Program'

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STAFFORD — A public riverfront park in North Stafford has been named to the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program.

The National Park Service recently made the designation, and the park, open to visitors throughout the year, is listed on the Civil War Trails network and Virginia Historic Highway Marker program.

To prepare for the upcoming Sesquicentennial Commemoration of the Civil War, and in light of the announcement, the Stafford Tourism Office plans to issue a new brochure and install a sign at the landing, as well as add a new information page to its Web site to educate visitors about Aquia Landing's role in the Network to Freedom.

"Stafford has played a pivotal role in the nation's history since before the Revolutionary War," said County Administrator Anthony Romanello. "The story of Aquia Landing illustrates the strength of the human spirit and chronicles the determination with which people seek personal liberty."

Located in eastern Stafford on the Potomac River, Aquia Landing was a pivotal gateway between southern states and northern ports from 1842 until 1862, serving as the only direct rail-to-steamboat transfer point on the Potomac River between Richmond and Washington, D.C. As the ending point of the Richmond Fredericksburg & Potomac Railroad, Aquia Landing became the site of the Civil War's first naval engagement, and a major supply base for the Army of the Potomac.

The port was an important access point through which fugitive slaves passed en route to freedom. Prior to 1862, Aquia Landing's noted visitors included former slaves such as William and Ellen Craft, Henry "Box" Brown, and John Washington. After April 1862, an estimated 10,000 slaves sought refuge behind Union lines and passed through the port by way of rail and steamships.

— *Tracy Bell from press release*