

Home linked to fugitive slave gets \$30G renovation grant (VIDEO)

By Jack Minch, jminch@sentinelandenterprise.com

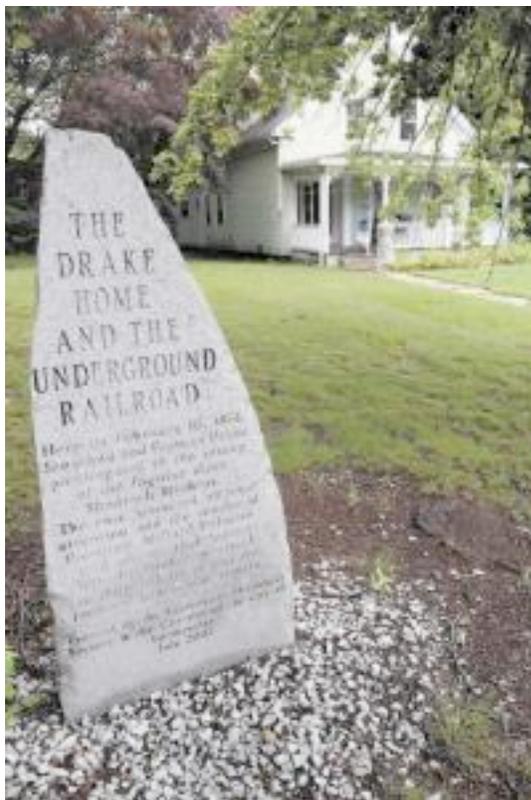
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Read more: http://www.sentinelandenterprise.com/news/ci_23590464/home-linked-fugitive-slave-gets-30g-renovation-grant#ixzz2Y4MyivheLEOMINSTER -- Free black men rescued Shadrach Minkins from a Boston courthouse after he was arrested on the then-new fugitive-slave law.

The free black men then shuttled Minkins around the city before taking him to a safe house in Concord, and finally to the Drake house in Leominster on Feb. 16, 1851.

It was a seminal moment in abolitionism that drew the admonition of President Millard Fillmore and cemented the feelings of those opposed to slavery, said local author and historian Mark Bodanza, who is writing a book on Minkins and the Drakes.

Mayor Dean Mazzarella announced Tuesday that the Massachusetts



SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE / JOHN LOVE This historical marker sits on the lawn of the Drake home at 21 Franklin St. to tell about its participation in the Underground Railroad.

Historical Commission has awarded the city a matching \$30,000 grant to plan the renovation of the Drake home at 21 Franklin St.

"We are actually going to have a set of documents and blueprints to make sure we are doing this right," Mazzarella said.

Developing the restoration plans will qualify the city to apply for construction grant funds, said the city's grants writer, Wendy Wiiks.

City officials will meet with the state Historical Commission to discuss what restoration needs to be done to the house, then put out a bid request in the fall, Wiiks said.

Peter Phillips owned the home and was ready to raze it until told of its history.

"Thankfully, he took the time to listen to the story, and when he knew the story



SENTINEL & ENTERPRISE/ JOHN LOVE The city of Leominster announced Tuesday that it received a \$30,000 grant to plan for the historical Drake home's restoration.

he put it on the National Historical Register," Bodanza said.

The City Council and the Leominster Historical Society agreed to split the purchase price for the home in March 2012 and bought it from Fannie Mae.

Despite the hot and humid weather on Tuesday, Historical Society Treasurer Angela Wallace donned an authentic 1860s dress to commemorate the grant announcement held at the home. Historical Society trustee Dave Wilson joined her and marveled at the surprising size of the house.

"It's amazing how the place keeps going on and on and on," Wilson said.

The mint-green home with asbestos shingle siding is showing its age. The porch flooring is rotting away, window panes are broken and plaster is falling off walls, leaving lath strips exposed.

"You can almost feel the history coming out when you walk in," said at-large City Councilor James Lanciani. "I think it's great. I think it shows what Leominster stood for then and what Leominster stands for now."

Jonathan and Frances Drake moved to Boston after their marriage in 1837 but returned for the birth of their second child in 1841 and moved into 21 Franklin St., Bodanza said.

The exact age of the Greek Revival-style house was not available Tuesday.

The Drakes remained in the home until Jonathan died in 1897 and Frances in 1900. Daniel Webster and Henry Clay wrote the Great Compromise of 1850. The legislation included a new fugitive-slave law that gave power to decide the fates of escaped slaves to a federal commissioner instead of a jury.

Minkins stayed at the Drakes' home from Feb. 16-20, 1851. He eventually made it to Montreal where he became a restaurateur.

"Had a family and a full life," Bodanza said.

Minkins made a beaded purse and sent it to Francis Drake as a thank-you. The Historical Society has it now.

The Drakes harbored other escaped slaves, but Minkins became famous because he was just the third arrested as part of the Great Compromise, Bodanza said. The first two cases were badly handled, so officials planned to use Minkins as a precedent-setting case, he said.

Dave Chester is a member of the Leominster Historical Commission and was the only black person at Tuesday's announcement. He hailed the city's efforts and the book that Bodanza is writing about the house.

Not enough is known about the black person's perspective in the underground railroad, Chester said.

"When they write history it's all about white people. It's not real history," he said. "They don't have black people in it, so this will be a good chance for them to read the book Mark is writing -- the real history."

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