

## CONCORD-CARLISLE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Polly Attwood, Chair  
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Established in 1978, the Council has a membership of approximately 700, with an Executive Board of 22.

On January 15, the Council held the first of its annual events, the Martin Luther King Celebration, in the Sanborn Auditorium. Attendees were treated to an evening of song and dance, comprised of the Willard 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Chorus under the direction of Charlyn Bethel, and the Boston Children's Choir under the direction of Michelle Adams. They sang separately, and then joined together for a finale.

The 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Holocaust Memorial Observance, coordinated by the Council at the request of the Concord Board of Selectmen, was held on April 26. The Board of Selectmen issued a Proclamation declaring the week of April 19-26 as the official Week of Remembrance for the Victims of the Holocaust, culminating in the Observance on the Sunday evening at the Town House. Chairman Greg Howes welcomed those attending on behalf of the Board of Selectmen. The speaker was Ms. Rosalie Gerut, describing her experience as the daughter of survivors, and telling of the lives of her parents. She also talked about the founding of the organization, "One by One," which seeks to bring reconciliation and healing to survivors and their children with the descendants of Nazi perpetrators.

The Human Rights Day Breakfast was held December 7 at the First Parish in Concord, hosted by the Reverend Gary Smith. The speaker was Chief of Police, Len Wetherbee whose insights into what makes a community work, and what promotes a climate for freedom in that community were invaluable. He has worked closely with many groups within the community -- the Human Rights Council, Communities for Restorative Justice, Domestic Violence Services Network, to name but a few.

The Council also took part in the July 4 Picnic in the Park, the annual Tree Lighting night in December,

showcasing Fair trade Coffee and 'Anti-Slavery' cakes to raise funds for ongoing projects of the Council.

Two sub-committees of the Council have been particularly active this year. Danielle Laura is heading up the founding of a METCO Scholarship Fund in memory of Abdirauf Abdullahi who was a CCHS METCO graduate killed in a random shooting in Boston two months before heading off to college on a full scholarship. The first fundraising event to build the scholarship fund was held in April, featuring local and Boston drumming and dance groups. The second annual fundraiser is planned for March, 2010.

The Drinking Gourd Committee, formed to establish an African-American and Abolitionists' Tour in Concord, has produced a map for the tour that shows Concord's historic places that were involved with the Abolition movement plus descriptions of involved residents. Town guides attended a training session sponsored by the Drinking Gourd Committee and the maps were distributed to the school, libraries, Chamber of Commerce, Concord Museum and Orchard House.

Thanks to the generosity of the husband of a Council member, the Committee was able to present a gift to the Concord School Committee of three framed exhibits of the Mary Rice/Abraham Lincoln petition. Mary Rice was a schoolteacher in Concord in the 1800's and also a stationmaster on the Underground Railroad. It was she who, moved by the story of John Jack's life, planted lilies on his grave. She gathered signatures of the children of Concord, attaching them to a petition to Abraham Lincoln, asking him to ensure that no children be enslaved. President Lincoln wrote back, saying, "Please tell these little people I am very glad their young hearts are so full of just and generous sympathy and that while I have not the power to grant all they ask, I trust that they will remember that God has, and that, as it seems, He will do it."

The Committee obtained archival copies of the petition, the signatures and Lincoln's reply, having them framed for each of the three Public Elementary Schools in Concord.

In the middle of the year, the Drinking Gourd Committee was alerted to the situation of the 'Peter Hutchinson house' on Bedford St. The owner had died, and the heirs

had put the property on the market, and applied to have the structure demolished. This particular house was on the Town's 'Demolition Delay' list, a bylaw that gives time for Town agencies to find ways to save structures of historic importance. A six-month delay was issued, and the Committee went to work. The house was originally built by freed slave Caesar Robbins in the area of the North Bridge and only later moved to the Bedford St. location.



Caesar Robbins House, 324 Bedford St.

Robbins and his extended family lived in the house for over one hundred years, and their stories touch on much of the history of Concord. They are mentioned by Thoreau, figure in the history of the Concord Female Anti-Slavery Society, have connections to the Barrett family, the Emerson-Bliss families, the Old Manse, and Simon Hunt.



*Detail of hand hewn timbers in Caesar Robbins house.*

The Committee began a fundraising campaign to purchase the property, save the house, and turn it into an

interpretive museum of African-American, Abolitionist and Civil Liberties history

The Drinking Gourd Committee applied for funding to the Concord Preservation Committee, which has been approved. We now wait for voters' approval at 2010 Town Meeting. Funds would then become available after July 1. Generous donations from interested citizens, and a matching funds challenge by a former local business owner Bill Barber, have done much to help reach the fundraising goal, but much more will be needed to preserve, renovate and turn the house into the interpretive site that is the ultimate goal.

Details and more information on these and other Human Rights Council activities can be found on the website [www.cchumanrights.org](http://www.cchumanrights.org).

In addition to the above activities, the Council has been involved in working with residents about rights violations, hate crimes and discrimination. We are not professional mediators, but act as a resource for the community in finding mediators, sensitivity training, legal advice, etc. We hosted Sunila Thomas George, from the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, at one of the monthly meetings, and worked with the police on a neighborhood dispute, as well as an incident of vandalism in the Town.

During the year, we co-sponsored The Homelessness Forum, the Communities for Restorative Justice Howard Zehr event, and the Combatants for Peace speakers at Kerem Shalom.

Two newsletters are published each year, fall and spring. Anyone who would like to be added to our mailing list can reach us at P.O. Box 744, Concord MA 01742.