

They are located, up thin, wooden flights of stairs in upper reaches of the church. You could have attended services for years and never noticed. There is a spirit and duplicity within these rooms -- a part and apart.

Proposal to St. Augustine's Vestry 1997



*The gallery was built for and used by the slaves,
behind the organ,
where they could take part in the service without being seen.*

Centennial Souvenir Book --- 1924

St Augustine's Church Slave Galleries Project

by Rodger Taylor

January 1, 2003:

Welcome to the year 2003!!!! I watched it arrive in church. The New Years Eve service has become a custom with me. Where better to be than with God to catch that spiritual moment of change? On the Lower East Side, a couple of blocks from home, with my family and my church family in the venerable rock gothic structure, the world, that is St. Augustine's Episcopal Church.

As the Reverend Errol A. Harvey ascended the pulpit to reflect on the passing year, I remember glancing at the old, brown framed, white, wooden pews. They look as if they could have been built in the early 1800s, as does the almost identical white balcony. Above the Rector, the churches' high, clean, ceiling and small, round, indented spotlights, seemed modern, almost art deco. I pondered the contrast of old and new. St. Augustine's is one of those neighborhood institutions that feel like it's been around forever. It almost has. 2003 is the **175th Anniversary of St. Augustine's Church.**

Father Harvey, a tall, broad, distinguished man, appeared a little overcome as he reached out for the words to grip the impending year. There had been several funerals recently at the Church. Father Harvey lost his own father in 2002. When he spoke I had a feeling his heart was wrapped somewhere around these events. As he concluded the sermon, I thought about the churches' 175th Anniversary. 175 years and the Reverend Errol Harvey is its' second African American rector. I hadn't given it much thought before. But suddenly at that moment, that thought, or a noise caused me to turn *my head* to the back of the church. Maybe it was the spirits moving over the ushers who flanked the side doors. My mind flew to two rooms hidden out of sight on each side of the organ, a short, skinny flight up from the balcony. Over time, these two rooms have gone from being used, to being a novelty, to being forgotten, to being controversial and historically significant. **They are St. Augustine's Slave Galleries.**

Slave Galleries or Negro Pews: Slavery extended into houses of worship throughout the 19th century and before. Forced into special sections in white run churches customarily, African New Yorkers stood in the back or sat in the balconies, or in some places, sparse and sometimes locked rooms called Slave Galleries.

As the clock struck twelve, we exchanged hugs and kisses. I found myself thinking about the folks who sat in those Slave Galleries above at St. Augustine's. I wondered what they did on New Years Eve. If they were in church, did they exchange hugs among themselves only? What if they were free and consigned to seating in that area or indentured servants? Were they happy, hopeful - angry? Were men in one room and women the other? I wondered about the dynamics social and otherwise, as those old African New Yorkers ushered in the New Year.

Father Harvey

"In seminary, I did a summer internship at St. Augustine's." Father Harvey told me. "I believe it was 1967, I heard about the Slave Galleries then. It was a passing remark. When I became Rector in 1983, I realized there was nothing much written and not much general knowledge about them."

“What I find interesting about the Slave Galleries is that they’re like an urban legend. The facts don’t dispute, but stretch it some. It’s a slave gallery but really the dates are sort of curious. Slavery, as such, was supposed to end in 1827 - the year before the building opened. So, why did you build slave galleries when you knew slavery was ending? What -- you didn’t believe it was going to happen?”

The Slave Galleries Committee

This latest Slave Galleries Committee began in September 1999. I’m a member. Usually meeting on a monthly basis, we’ve promoted four annual events including the latest, scheduled for January 25, 2003. We’ve worked with several organizations, including Animating Democracy Initiative (ADI), the Lower East Side Community Preservation Project (LESCPP), City Lore, and others, monitored grants and donations as they’ve come in, and generally directed and pushed the project. Father Harvey is an active member. Deacon Edgar Hopper is the single individual who personifies the group. In many ways he is the Slave Galleries’ gate-keeper.

“It really peaked my curiosity, not that there was a slave gallery, but that there was one in the church that I belonged to.” A native New Yorker, Edgar Hopper was born 73 years ago and raised in Brooklyn. The Deacon, like many African Americans, learned about the history of his family through a sketchy undocumented oral tradition. “It’s always been part of the verbal law of my family that certain of my great, great grandparents, aunts and uncles were slaves on Staten Island. Several are buried there, in the Frederick Douglass Memorial Cemetery. All this gets tied into a funny kind of a ball of wax for me. My first visit to the Slave Galleries and everyone since has been very emotional.”

“The dialogic process, as it was taught to several members of the Slave Galleries Committee through the auspices of the Animating Democracy Initiative, has been another illuminating part of this experience.” Deacon Hopper recalled a visit by an after school class from the Eldridge Street Project. “They were Chinese kids, most had never been in a church before. They came with one-dollar donations and were fascinated by the statues and figurines in the parish. The slave galleries experience frightened many of them. But there was one kid who had made it clear that he didn’t like museums and he didn’t want to be there. During the dialog, he stuck his head out of his coat the way a turtle would and told us that providing a video component would make the tour more exciting. As far as I was concerned that comment was actionable and invaluable.”

As gate-keeper, Deacon Hopper swings doors open and shut. “There are times when I don’t want to go up there. I don’t want to confront those personal and emotional feelings. I know it’s not fair, but if your interest is intellectual, professional or educational I’m supportive of that. I won’t show the Slave Galleries to everybody. I’ve had to work on it, but sometimes I feel, hey, we’re not letting any phonies up in here today.”

Hector Pena

Hector is a multi media specialist, long time leader of the St. Augustine’s Gospel Choir, former Slave Galleries Committee member.

“I heard about the Slave Galleries before I actually came to the church in 1983. I used to work for Father Harvey in the Bronx. On the phone he described St. Augustine’s and told me about them. The thing I remember most was that nobody made a big deal about the Slave Galleries. They were never talked about. It wasn’t until Father Harvey started really pushing the history of the place that it became a point of interest.”

The Slave Galleries and a happy 175th Anniversary flashback

When you consider 175 years and the history of the Slave Galleries, you have to cover the history of two churches. What was first All Saints’ Free Church became St. Augustine’s.

On the 27th of May 1824 Episcopal services began in a wooden building located on Grand and Pitt Streets. The spiritual leader was the Reverend William Atwater Clark. George Dominick and James P. Allaire were wardens. Allaire appears to be one of the stars of the well to do mercantile group that founded and supported All Saints.’ He built engines and worked closely with Robert Fulton, of steamboat fame. In 1816, Allaire constructed and ran a huge steam engine and brass foundry near the docks on Cherry St.

The wood church on Pitt Street quickly became too small for the congregation. In 1827 they commenced and in 1828 completed the construction of a church nestled between Henry, Madison and Scamel Streets. It stood pretty much as it does today. On June 5, 1828 when All Saints’ Free Church opened at least Rev. Clark and James Allaire, harbored the dream of being a free church—meaning people would not have to pay for a seat when they came. Rev. Clark wrote, “the proclamation to all, high and low, rich and poor, one with another, that this is the House of God for **all** people.”

This is not quite an urban legend, but when All Saints’ Free Church opened the pews were for sale. Throughout Reverend Clark’s tenure, though it infuriated him, All Saints’ Church was never free. I wonder if they charged for the slave galleries, and if so who paid?

Lower East Side: We may not be sophisticated but we’re real.

In the old days the Church was known as the last outpost of Christianity before the river. In many ways today it still is. This part of the Lower East Side where Henry, East Broadway and Grand Streets triangulate into a block that leads to the East River, remains remote and residential, against the throbbing metropolis of downtown Manhattan. There are no numbered streets, in Loisiada or the LES. If you’re not familiar, you’re lost.

Despite whatever mixture of well off, working class and poor there’s been in the area, tenement type poverty has been the community’s poster child. Though it was founded by wealthy businessmen, St. Augustine’s, like much of the neighborhood, has been in financial trouble pretty steadily since 1850s.

All Saints’ becomes St. Augustine’s

By the 1900s the Lower East Side was predominantly Jewish. The two Episcopal churches in the area, St. Augustine’s Chapel on East Houston Street near Second Avenue

and All Saints' had been kept alive through the financial support of Trinity Church. On January 15, 1945 Father Berngen became the priest-in-charge of both institutions. He led a socially active ministry with a clear mandate to work with the African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the area. By 1949 the old St. Augustine's closed and the two churches were joined. All Saints' Church was named St. Augustine's and the congregation quickly became African American.

St. A's and me

I began my relationship with St. Augustine's, as a child in the 1960's. I didn't go every week. My attendance generally depended on what was going on in my family. However, I went to Sunday school for some time at St. A's. As a rebellious teen and twenty year old, I went to church less and less. As I got older, married and moved back in the area, St. Augustine's evolved into my place. I still don't go every week, but I stay involved.

The Partnership

In 1999 the Tenement Museum and St. Augustine's formed a partnership on the Slave Galleries Project. In many ways this seemed like the perfect marriage, in some ways it didn't. "It wasn't until we gave an award to Ruth Abram, (the director of the Tenement Museum) in my remarks I may have mentioned the slave galleries," Father Harvey told me, "Ruth said I think I can get you money to find out more about it. We talked. She came up with a proposal and we ran with it."

"Ruth Abram offered to become our fiscal conduit and to work with us." Deacon Hopper added. "It gave us immediate access to some expertise in how to restore, preserve and raise money." Liz Sevckenko was chosen to be the Tenement Museum's liaison on the project and Lisa Chice was her primary support person.

Both the Slave Galleries Project and the Tenement Museum gained prestige and money from this agreement. The Slave Galleries Committee was given a line budget for the over a quarter of a million dollars that was raised. Roz Li, a noted Preservation Architect, was hired to make a historical assessment of the Slave Galleries' paint and physical structure and possibly, depending on how much money is left, determine the cost of restoration. A small team of grad students, led by Allan Ingrahm did historical research.

"From its inception the partnership was designed to dissolve." Father Harvey reminded me. January 2003 is significant on that level as well. St. Augustine's partnership with the Tenement Museum ends at the end of the month.

"I wish the relationship would last another year" Deacon Hopper added. "9/11 happened to us. The Tenement Museum lost budget and people. The money dried up for projects they thought they were getting. If I had another six months or a year, I would focus on some formalized instruction for our committee. That was all part of my vision about what would come out of this, and that's the only thing I'm not getting. This is how we do PR as soon as we know about a project. This is how we do fundraising, docent training. The good thing is that I'm sure we will be able to work on most of these issues, because

the Tenement Museum is still committed to help and support the Slave Galleries project in everyway they conceivably can.”

Hector Pena offered a differing perspective. “I’ve always felt it was a relationship born out of necessity because of their connections. They’ve been good friends and have done a lot to help. I’ve always believed that we could do it ourselves. So the good thing is yeah, they helped, but them leaving is going to force the committee to stand on it’s own two feet.”

Liz Sevchenko

“I had never before felt so much as I did when I was first introduced the slave galleries. There is this screaming silence. It’s amazing how you can feel the spirits of the people who were there. The wood is just soaked in it.”

January 14, 2003:

As I sat in what we call the common room, at a slave galleries committee meeting, discussing a youth jazz band that was supposedly appearing at Slave Galleries annual event later this month and being lambasted for not being able to answer detailed questions like -- how many band members are there? - Or, how much is it going to cost? - I thought of something Deacon Hopper said.

“Working on the Slave Galleries project has been a very thankless task. From the point of view of doing some work and having the satisfaction of people enjoying, or having an appreciation for what you have done. People who get involved in historical sites have got to have this messianic feeling otherwise it doesn’t work. It’s just a bunch of old bricks.”

Call him cantankerous but he’s right. No one ever gives you any credit for doing this work. I find myself going to Scrapbook Society Meetings. A group that is an amalgam of New York African American historical sites and groups, Episcopal Church Archivists meetings, a group of Episcopal Church archivists. Of course I go to Slave Gallery Committee meetings, try to help plan events and work on organizing the mounting number of documents related to the slave galleries project.

I realize for me the Slave Galleries project is a ministry. It’s part of what I do. Uncovering the hidden history of African New Yorkers is fun and exciting. I love participating in it. A little more than a decade ago my experience at the African Burial Ground transformed me. When the City’s Archeologist caught the construction company illegally scooping up and dumping the human remains from this historic site, I got my dream unpaid job. I became part of New York State Senator, David Paterson’s Task Force on the African Burial Ground. Being allowed to go down to the site at any time as a community observer, seeing those skeletal remains, feeling their presence and working to help protect them made history real to me and cemented my love for this work.

At the Slave Galleries Committee meeting much to my relief, another committee member took over the task of securing the youth jazz band. As I left I had that familiar feeling of impending doom that I imagine many people who promote events feel. There seemed to

be a myriad of issues swirling around. Communication problems - would our featured speaker show up? A big question, would we have musicians? Our decision to go ahead with the event was rushed. Our promotion was lame. Would the public even come?

Yes, there was slavery on the Lower East Side

Emancipation became New York law in 1799. Due to the way the law was written, the vast majority, were not totally free until 1827. Even after slavery ended, I'd argue, New York City continued to be the northern capital of the slave trade. They came to metropolitan ports from Africa or the West Indies, often as a transfer point on the way down South. The trade and products they generated made the city rich.

By the 1820s a noticeable number of African New Yorkers seemed to push the limits of their roles. Many demanded equal treatment and refused to be docile servants, but the New York establishment was in no way ready to acquiesce, share facilities or compete on a level playing field. Excluded from most professions and many jobs, restricted to certain areas when allowed on trains, ships and buses, African New Yorkers were also banned from libraries, theaters, and other public places. Danger met them on city streets. Women, children and men, even those as prominent as Frederick Douglass and restaurateur, Thomas Downing, were on occasion, attacked. Black churches, property and businesses were also targets. The African Grove Theater, was closed simply because many could not stomach the idea of African Americans performing Shakespeare.

Even whites who supported New York's African American population were often found wanting, as this article from the *Colored American* (an early New York African American newspaper) attests: "Progress would be made more rapidly, if teachers of schools, academies and colleges would receive and encourage the attendance of colored pupils, if professional men, merchants, artisans, etc., would hold out facilities for them to enter on new and useful employments; and if the friends of our cause, generally, would, in their intercourse with them, act more in consistency with their principles." The writer also declared, "If professedly Christian Churches would do away with the odious distinction of the "Negro pew."

Slave Gallery Reflections

I can't remember when I first heard about the slave galleries but I do know, I believed the development of a Slave Galleries historic project was essential for the church and the community. There were a few committees that attempted to initiate this task in the 1990s. I was on all of them. In 1997 a request was made that I submit a report to the Churches' Vestry about the need to begin a Slave Galleries Project. Within the report I requested a (nonpaying) position as lead researcher. I shot high but was willing to negotiate. For months, I seethed, when there was no response to my report, my request and of course, no project.

Katherine Murray

Katherine was involved in one of the earlier St. Augustine's committees that focused on the Slave Galleries.

“I don’t think I heard much about Slave Galleries until Father Harvey came. He talked about them a lot. I was on the vestry and was chairperson of the program committee. I think about 1997. We came together to discuss what we wanted to do for the Slave Galleries. We were going to make decisions, do the research and make it more a church project.”

The Slave Galleries in an around the 1920s

During this period, several articles in books and newspapers celebrated the rediscovery of the Slave Galleries’ uniqueness and importance.

Here’s a quote from a piece published in 1916 entitled, *The Last Remaining Church Slave Gallery in New York*

“The present day visitor at All Saints’ may climb the same narrow stairs up which labored the asthmatic mamutes and body servants, put his finger in the slot of the bolt that locked in the slaves and sit on the benches on which played and trifled the pickannies. Lucky was the first rector, the Rev. Atwater Clark, for at least some of his congregation could not escape during the sermon!”

A less offensive reference appeared in 1927 – “The slave galleries at All Saints’ are believed to be the only ones to be found in New York to-day remaining in appearance quite as they were when in use a century ago. Hence, they are objects of keen interest to visitors and many come to the old church to see them.”

In 1923 a New York historical guidebook indicated that within the Slave Galleries was a “Lincoln Museum” and a “Netherland Antiquity Museum.”

Pageants were a craze in the early 20th century as thousands of Americans celebrated their neighborhood history by acting it out in elaborate theatrical productions. All Saints created a pageant for their Centennial celebration in 1924. The following offers a reflection on the congregation’s insight on church history, the Slave Galleries and emancipation in New York.

All Saints: All Saint’s was founded 1824 by Dr. Clark, who sold his library to rent a room to gather straying sheep into a church for Eastern settlement.

East Side: After the war of 1812, like now, our glorious Country had been left with overplus of ships which to employ. The merchants started an East Indian trade, whose clippers berthed on East Side shore creating docks and stores and factories and ship-yards, whose wealthy owners had to live near-by their business; so they settled fresh on East Broadway, that led unto Mt. Pitt, whose granite built the walls of our All Saints’.

All Saints: So then, East Side, you were not always poor?

East Side: Ah no ! I was New York’s Fifth Avenue. Here dwelt the traders who grew millionaires, importing sugars, spices, cotton, fruits and slaves!

(Enter, Negro Slave, followed by many Slave Children, all clanking chains from wrist to wrist, singing Sewanee River, which is joined in by all, during Slave Posture Drill of Imploration.)

Slave: O Massa, am I gwine to be forgot? Alone for me is there no room in Heav’n?

All Saints: Come in dear Negro Slave, you too may come; for you I build two special galleries, where you, locked in, may join in all the hymns and shout Amen! to what your Masters pray

Another part of the pageant addresses the liberation of the enslaved in New York

Uncle Tom: Black Tom am I, who guard my little Miss whose golden curls make me her willing slave. When she is sad, I wipe away her tears, when she is cheerful, in her laugh I join; she is my sun-shine and my oracle, who reads for me the blessed Word of God.

Little Eva: The little tyrant maiden I; a stamp of mine brings Tom unto his knees, a smile, and Tom springs up into a dance. If I should die, I want my Tom with me to pick me daisies in the heav'nly meads, and sing refrains unto my hymns on high; Please, please, St. Clair, release him for my sake!
(Imploration Slave Posture Drill, to Old Black Joe.)

Slave: In bondage still, will no one me release?

New York

Governor: I will; 'tis time New York kill slavery!
(Draws his sword, and taps kneeling Slave)

Slave: Glory, glory, hallelujah, freedom!

Bennett Dickerson

“All that we heard was what it was, not anything historical. If I remember right they had told me that at that time for the organ to run well it had to be heated. They brought the slaves in and they would heat it. I'm not sure if it was logs and fire or there was some other heating mechanism involved. The slaves didn't just come up there to sit. They kept the organ going. I remember seeing the wooden benches up there in those rooms.”

gate keeper redux

“I've learned so much from Deacon Hopper,” said the Tenement Museum's Liz Sevchenko, “there's nobody like him. He's tough, that's for sure, but once you learn how to work with him he's a total inspiration. He calls B.S. when he sees it. He's been great with just keeping us on track. He always can identify the holes in the plan, the tough things we have to work on.”

Deacon Hopper

“The folks at the museum used to say you've got to tell us how to say this because you're going to say it in a way none of us will ever be able to. The thing about proposals is the language has got to be complete. The people you're giving them to need to become infected with your enthusiasm because what they have to do is sell it to their institutions. Fundraising is five percent proposal and ninety-five percent developing a relationship with the grant institution. For example, the Tenement Museum had gotten turned down once. They brought the people to St. Augustine's for a site visit anyway. I was able to convince them to give us the money.”

January 25, 2003: *The Slave Galleries Annual Event*

The youth jazz band was not coming. Father Harvey asked a Church friend and talented percussionist, Norman Riley, who had magnanimously kept the date clear, to perform. I

was not thrilled to find out that Father Harvey indeed had arthroscopic surgery on his knee and was advised to stay off of it. Thankfully, he still planned to attend. I felt even better after talking to committee member Oland Saltes, who had opened the parish so that the musicians and folks from Savacou Gallery, who were going to be selling artwork downstairs after the program, could set up.

When I got to the church things continued to look up. Committee member Minnie Curry had done a wonderful job again with the food and had help. I was thrilled when our keynote speaker, Lorraine Johnson Coleman arrived shortly after I did. I was soon mortified. The program was scheduled to begin at 1 and by 1:10PM the church was still empty. However, as is so often the case with African American events by 1:30PM, as Father Harvey limped up the block, we had a crowd. The program started. Norman Riley's band sounded great.

Soon it was Lorraine's turn. "I don't want to talk about those twelve people they bring up every February during Black History month. Y'all know those twelve people Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman" – Lorraine rattled off some other names. She acknowledged their genius. She wasn't putting them down, but she wanted to talk about ordinary folks. "Because they're the ones who I think are the *ingenious*. You know those *ingenious people*, who can take leftovers, add some water to it, make a big pot of rice and feed everybody in this Church." Lorraine kept us laughing and spoke to those spirits in the slave galleries.

Evelyn Holloman

"In the 1940s I was in the choir. We used to climb up those little stairs all the time to rehearse. It was right near the organ. We would sing up there on Sundays. I was really surprised to learn it was a slave gallery."

Antebellum New York and Lower East Side

African New Yorkers were very visible in the city. Many labored on the docks or at outdoor food markets. Others sold food on the streets. Some cleared them when it snowed. There were dance contests, prizefights, songs and street performance. In early morning an army of African New York sweeps moved about trying to keep the city clean. In the winter sawyers providing firewood, took over the sidewalks cutting logs and forcing pedestrians into the streets. Emptying the latrines or privies late at night, another army of blacks, the tubmen swarmed over the city. These men often brought rum apparently to numb or anesthetize themselves. Inevitably sometimes tubs were dropped, leaving reminders of their work the following day. Their late night singing, yelling and fighting also generated a battery of complaints.

Sunday evenings African Americans, dressed to the nines would "stroll" down Broadway. In 1821 a New Yorker writing for the *New-York Columbian* that August counted 1,480 Black New Yorkers in just under two hours. Two other observers noted. "They were all well dressed, and very many much better than whites. Further, they "usually walk four or five a breast, arm and arm, with cigars in their mouths, bid defiance to all opposition, and almost universally compel our most respectable citizens, returning

from church with their families, to take the outside of the walk, and sometimes to leave the sidewalk altogether.”

Liz Sevckenko

“They could have been indentured servants, enslaved or so-called free, but they were black and all lumped together. It striking how much African American history is American history. Many people have had these experiences of being marginalized. Florence Li-Maldonado, a Youth Program Director for the Chinese American Planning Council, didn’t know much about northern slavery, but when she went to the Slave Galleries her reaction was they felt just like Chinatown.”

Bancker Street

Bancker Street was noted for it’s African American nightlife. For years, basement clubs, bars and dancehalls, many Black owned, pulsated with dancers and musicians. “A large map of Africa had been rendered in charcoal on the dance floor and opposite the band there shone an imposing transparency, which depicted the Abolition Society breaking the shackles of slaves, and a vessel about to sail for Liberia.” A writer described the inside of a Philadelphia dancehall in the early 19th century, a scene undoubtedly similar to what was occurring on **Bancker Street**.

Another writer described a walk on the block, “oyster stands and numerous tables of eatables that rendered passage along the sidewalks all but impossible. But the most visible, and audible, were the street peddlers, those smutty vendors who roll out the long words – Cha-a-a-a-r-r Co-a-a-le in varying tones upon each syllable as long as the anaconda. From early in the morning until late at night- far too late by many accounts- their distinctive cries could be heard all over the city. Hollers such as he-e-e-e-e-er’s your find Rocka-a-way clams and, most famously, in the autumn months, the ubiquitous “h-a-u-t corn,” h-a-urt ca-irr-ne, formed a recurring and often disconcerting part of the city’s soundscape.”

The wealthy, “respectable” Bancker family apparently embarrassed by the association with slums and Black New York demanded the street be renamed. On October 23, 1826, two years before St. Augustine’s was built on the street and ten years before there was a Madison Avenue, in honor of the former President, James Madison, **Bancker Street** became **Madison Street**.

Henry Nichols

One parishioner I haven’t talked about is Henry Nichols. He, his wife Phebe and at least two of their children, William and one also named Phebe, were baptized at All Saints.’ They lived at 11 Lewis Street, only a few short blocks from the Church. According to the 1830 census, Henry Nichols and his family were black. Henry was listed as a saddler in 1829 and a year later a harness maker.

One wonders if at the baptism Henry and his family consigned to seating in one or both of the Slave Galleries, climbed back up there to participate in the rest of the service. An oddity is that there is no mention of his race in the baptismal records. In this era most

churches kept meticulous records, particularly when participating person was African American.

January 31, 2003:

I thought about **the slave galleries** high up, small, rectangular, unpainted wood, fresh invisible air, barren, I've always felt a comfort in the those rooms, a connection to the distant past, horse drawn carts and scenic views of the river atop the hill that rose north and west from the shore.

On January 31, 2003, the day the partnership between the Slave Galleries Project and the Tenement Museum officially ended, there were no parting ceremonies and tearful celebrations – no beginnings of renovation or fancy research designs, no timelines or concrete plans.

“There are some internal decisions that St. Augustine’s needs to make.” Liz Sevchenko advised. “How public do you want to be? Do you want to have a separate 501(c)(3)? Do you want to be open all the time? We just tried to lay the groundwork but some kind of infrastructure has to be built.”

There was, I remember, a Sunday I snuck up to a Slave Gallery with two 9 year olds, my son and his friend. We didn't stay up there long but for a minute I felt like we were flying, being bathed in our history. Looking at it from **a 175 year perspective**, it's easy to feel hopeful about the Slave Galleries project.

“The only thing that's ending is the Tenement Museum's direct financing of everything. Otherwise, we'll be there, Liz Sevchenko added referring to the Museum's continued involvement and support. “There's no other place that has the power that these spaces have.”