



The Connecticut Freedom Trail

documents and designates sites that celebrate the struggle for justice and equality that continues in the 21st century. Sites depict the efforts, in all their forms, of the state's African American community and all the communities that championed the goals of universal freedom and human dignity.

Application for Listing the Connecticut Freedom Trail

The following is a list of CRITERIA that the Selection Committee has developed. Keep these points in mind as you answer the questions in the application.

1. How the site represents one of more of the eligible categories: Amistad; Civil Rights; Concepts of Freedom; Underground Railroad;
2. If the site is the location of a "First," or how it provided opportunities for others that followed;
3. How the site is centered around Connecticut African-American history/events; and
4. If sufficient time has passed to be able to evaluate the site within the context of history (ideally at least 50 years, but there may be some sites of importance that are less than 50 years old).

Contact information of the individual or organization presenting application (please note this entity will be considered the Site Ambassador if listed):

Name: Patricia E. Kelly, Ebony Horsewomen, Inc

Address: 337 Vine St

City: Hartford State: CT Zip: 06002

Phone: 860-293-2914

E-Mail: pkelly@ebonyhorsewomen.us

Site Information:

Type of site (check at least one):

- Amistad
- Civil Rights
- Concepts of Freedom
- Underground Railroad

Name of site (if applicable): Mary Fields Horse & Heritage Museum

Address: 337 Vine Street

City: Hartford State: CT Zip: 06112

Longitude and Latitude of building or site to be included on the Connecticut Freedom Trail for future GPS mapping: _____

Property Owner:

Name: City of Hartford

Address: 550 Main St.

City: Hartford State: CT Zip: 06103

Phone: _____

E-Mail: _____

General information:

Present use of property: Leased

Age of property: 2yrs old

Open to Public: Yes No Visible from the Public Road: Yes No

Historic Designations:

Is the project site recognized for its architectural/cultural/historical significance by any of the following designation programs? (Check all that apply.) Visit connctris.ct.gov to determine if the property has a designation.

| | Yes | No |
|--|-------|-------|
| National Historic Landmark | [] | [x] |
| National Register of Historic Places | [] | [] |
| Individually listed | [] | [] |
| Contributing to a District District Name: _____ | [] | [] |
| State Register of Historic Places | [x] | [] |
| Individually listed | [] | [] |
| Contributing to a District District Name: __Hartford_____ | [] | [] |
| Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) | [] | [] |
| Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) | [] | [] |
| Other: (specify)_____ | [] | [] |

Is there any additional historic information that the Committee should be aware of that is not covered under "Historic Designations"? If so, please enter it in the box below.

Please describe the site and how it represents one or more of the categories for inclusion. Include any relevant sources and documentation in the bibliography. Attach additional sheets if necessary.

Historic Keney Park in Hartford is a 693-acre, Olmsted-designed landscape in the city's North End that has long served as a green commons and cultural anchor for surrounding communities. Created from an initial 533-acre bequest by Henry

Keney in the 1890s and expanded over time, it is one of the largest designed urban park landscapes in the United States and a key part of Hartford's historic park system. Generations of North End residents—including substantial Jewish and African American populations—have used Keney Park for family gatherings, recreation, and community events, making it a focal point of neighborhood life and identity.

Keney Park aligns most directly with the Connecticut Freedom Trail's "concept of freedom" category, which recognizes places that embody the movement toward freedom and equality and the heritage of African American citizens in Connecticut. As a large public landscape in a historically Black neighborhood, Keney Park has functioned as accessible open space in a city where racialized housing patterns and disinvestment limited other opportunities for Black residents to gather, play, organize, and connect with nature. In recent decades, Black-led initiatives in the park—including community stewardship, youth development, and cultural programming—have continued this legacy, using the park as a living platform for health, environmental justice, and African American heritage. Together, the park's design history, its central role in North End community life, and its ongoing use by Black residents make Keney Park a powerful landscape of freedom, self-determination, and resilience that meets the Freedom Trail's criteria

Within this historic landscape sits the Ebony Horsewomen Equestrian and Therapeutic Center and its newly opened Mary Fields Horse and Heritage Museum, a community museum dedicated to Black and Indigenous equestrian history. The 1,400-square-foot museum, named for Mary "Stagecoach Mary" Fields, presents exhibitions, artifacts, and programs that reclaim the almost-erased history of Black cowboys and horsewomen, while also documenting Ebony Horsewomen's four decades of service to Hartford youth, families, and veterans. Located at 337 Vine Street inside Keney Park, the site is free and open to the public and uses horses, material culture, and storytelling to interpret African American experiences of labor, mobility, resilience, and self-determination.

Together, Keney Park and the Mary Fields Horse and Heritage Museum align most clearly with the Connecticut Freedom Trail's "concept of freedom" category, which recognizes places that embody the movement toward freedom and equality and the heritage of African American citizens in Connecticut. As a Black-led equestrian center and museum in a historic public park in Hartford's North End, the site offers both a preserved landscape of community life and an active, living institution where Black history, healing, and culture are centered—making it a strong candidate for inclusion on the Connecticut Freedom Trail. Further, Mary "Stagecoach Mary" Fields embodies the concept of freedom at the heart of the Connecticut Freedom Trail. Born enslaved in Tennessee, she seized her own liberation and later became the first African American woman Star Route mail carrier for the U.S. Post Office, working as an independent contractor in Montana. Her life defied the constraints of race, gender, and age: a self-employed, armed Black woman who controlled her labor, mobility, and reputation in the Jim Crow era. By interpreting her story in Hartford, the Mary Fields Horse and Heritage Museum connects Connecticut audiences to a national figure whose courage, economic independence, and insistence on dignity powerfully illuminate the long struggle toward freedom and equality recognized by the Freedom Trail.

Signature of Applicant: _____

Patricia Kelley

Date of Submission: _____

Bibliography and/or Other Reference Information:

Mary "Stagecoach Mary" Fields (c.1832–1914) was an American Black pioneer whose life bridged slavery, emancipation, and the rugged freedom of the western frontier. Born into slavery in Tennessee, she was emancipated after the Civil War and worked on a Mississippi River steamboat before joining the household of Judge Edmund Dunne and eventually the Ursuline convent in Toledo, Ohio. In 1885 she followed Mother Mary Amadeus to St. Peter's Mission in Montana Territory, where she did demanding "men's work," hauling freight, repairing buildings, tending stock, and becoming a trusted forewoman.

In 1895, in her early sixties, Fields secured a Star Route contract with the U.S. Post Office Department, becoming the first African American woman—and only the second woman in the nation—to carry mail as an independent contractor. Traversing a treacherous route between Cascade and St. Peter's Mission, she drove a stagecoach or walked in snowshoes to deliver mail, never missing a day in eight years of service. Taller than six feet, often armed and unafraid to defend herself, she nevertheless became beloved in Cascade for her generosity, especially toward children, running a laundry, operating eateries, and helping neighbors in need. Mary Fields died in 1914, remembered locally as a legend and nationally as a symbol of resilience, autonomy, and Black womanhood on the American frontier

Furthermore, Ebony Horsewomen, Inc. and the Mary Fields Horse and Heritage Museum are bound together by a shared lineage of Black women using horses, and public service to claim space, power, and possibility. Founded in 1984 by Patricia E. Kelly, a U.S. Marine Corp veteran, as a Black women's riding club that grew into a nationally recognized equine therapeutic center, Ebony Horsewomen has spent four decades breaking barriers in a field that has long excluded people of color, especially women. Like Mary "Stagecoach Mary" Fields—who transformed a life begun in slavery into one of economic independence, physical courage, and self-defined womanhood on the Western frontier—the Black women of Ebony Horsewomen harness equestrian skill to assert leadership, nurture youth, and heal their community.

Through the museum, our contemporary horsewomen interpret Mary Fields not as distant legend, but as an ancestor in our own tradition: a working Black woman whose hands on the reins symbolized control over her labor, movement, and destiny. Exhibits and programs highlight both Fields's pioneering role as the first Black woman Star Route mail carrier and the ongoing work of Black women in Hartford who run an equestrian and therapeutic campus in historic Keney Park, mentor girls and young women riders, and maintain Black presence on the land. This living continuity between a nineteenth-century frontier pioneer and twenty-first-century Black women equestrians in Connecticut concretely links the site to the Connecticut Freedom Trail's focus on the concept of freedom and the enduring struggle of African Americans to shape their own lives, narratives, and institutions.

Photographs:

Color photographs and a site map are a requirement and should be included below. The photographs should include: a CONTEXT image (depicting the location of the site, such as, an aerial view, streetscape, neighborhood or city map); front, back, and side views of the main structures, pertinent interior views, and any other views or details that are important to explaining the nature of the nomination.



