Railroad for this little part of the state and to tell the story of the Underground Railroad.

Hambrick, director of the River Road African American Museum and Gallery in Ascension Parish, read in the 1984 article that steamboats plying the waters of the Mississippi River sometimes served as escape vessels for slaves.

Hambrick reasoned that if slaves from Evergreen Plantation in Wallace used the river to flee the St. James Parish sugar cane plantation, other slaves from plantations at Burnside and Donaldsonville in Ascension Parish probably did the same.

Last year, as a result of Hambrick's interest in illuminating Louisiana's role in the Underground Railroad, the museum became the only historical site in the state to become recognized by the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program.

The Underground Railroad was a system of routes and safe houses that slaves

employed, with the assistance of abolitionists, in escaping from bondage in the Slave States before the Civil War.

The slaves' acts of self-emancipation made them fugitives in the eyes of slaveholders and many Southerners, but freedom-seekers in the views of people and institutions opposed to slavery.

The federal program awarded the museum a $40,000 grant to help tell the story of black resistance to slavery through escape and flight.

Tuesday, five officials with the National Park Service program toured the museum, which occupies one room inside Tezcuco Plantation in Darrow, while Hambrick explained her plans for the grant money.

Hambrick said that by September, the museum will house a computer database of the names of the slaves in Louisiana's river parishes between 1791 and 1820.

Hambrick said she also will use part of the grant money to produce a curriculum to teach middle-school students about the history of slavery in south Louisiana and the operation of the Underground Railroad in the state.

Hambrick said the curriculum is needed because a specific study of Louisiana slave history is not taught in Ascension Parish public schools.

Hambrick also said that another sign that slaves in the river parishes area used the Underground Railroad to escape is an abundance of antebellum newspaper ads reporting to readers that slaves had fled from plantations.

The ads name the families who owned the plantations, the first names of the slaves and rewards offered for locating the escapees.

The database of slave names will be started with the 100,000 names already gathered by historian Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, author of the book, "Africans in Colonial Louisiana."

"We, the museum, will add 4,000 names to that database," Hambrick said.

Diane Miller, national coordinator of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program, said she was impressed with the Ascension Parish museum during her visit Tuesday.

"I think this place is a great resource, as a small museum, to tell the story of these people and to tell the story of the Underground Railroad for this little part of the country," Miller said.

"The Advocate" photo by Steven Ward

Kathe Hambrick, director of the River Road African American Museum and Gallery in Darrow, points out names of slaves from the river parishes to federal officials representing the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program on Tuesday.