

Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing Festival set for Saturday, May 7

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ST. LOUIS - The annual **Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing festival** is taking place from 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Saturday, May 7, at Missouri's first nationally recognized Underground Railroad site, the historic Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing.

The site, which is located on the banks of the Mississippi River in North St. Louis City, plays an important role in both Illinois and Missouri history. It was there that Mary Meachum, a free woman of color, helped guide many slaves to freedom by helping them cross over to the free state of Illinois.

The free event, titled "Beginnings of a Brave New World," will celebrate what life was like after the Civil War in 1866, with a focus on education and the rise of black cultural institutions. The event will feature several re-enactments, including men training to become "Buffalo Soldiers," which consisted of four black infantry and two black cavalry regiments formed with the passage of the Army Reorganization Act in 1866 (many of these soldiers were trained in St. Louis - at Jefferson Barracks).

The event will also feature living history, with appearances by several costumed performers; music; food and drinks for purchase; games and scavenger hunts for kids, and a competition between local choirs from area churches.

The Buffalo Soldiers played an important role in our nation's history, and four of the six regiments that were created were raised in St. Louis at Jefferson Barracks. Dubbed "Buffalo Soldiers" by Native Americans they encountered along the way, these African-Americans, many of whom had served in the Civil War, escorted and protected wagon trains and telegraph and railroad work crews as an unprecedented amount of American pioneers expanded westward to settle the western territories of the U.S. Residents of all ages attending the free celebration will be able to view re-enactments of men training to become Buffalo Soldiers, and some costumes will be available on site for those interested in donning clothing from the period.

The event will also feature living history, with appearances by several costumed performers; music; and food and drinks for purchase. Event highlights will include additional re-enactments, games and scavenger hunts for kids, and a competition between local choirs from area churches.

A sunset flag ceremony and a traditional barn dance, featuring "called dances" with opportunities for attendees join in, will round out the event. Guests are welcome to come in 1866 attire or just as they are. Event organizers will also honor historically black Lincoln University, which is located in Jefferson City and owes its founding to contributions made by the Black 62nd and 65th regiments organized at Benton Barracks, located on what is now known as Fairgrounds Park. "With the freedom that the end of the Civil War brought, many were left wondering, 'What's next?'" said Angela da Silva, Adjunct Professor at Lindenwood University and historical reenactor director and event manager.

"This event is a great opportunity for everyone to think about what life was like for newly-freed slaves." The Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing site is located on the Mississippi River Greenway on the banks of the Mississippi River, just north of Merchant's Bridge in North St. Louis City (28 E. Grand Ave., St. Louis, MO 63147).

The site commemorates the work of Mary Meachum, a free woman of color who helped guide many slaves to freedom by helping them to cross over to the free state of Illinois, and later helped to spearhead education efforts for men, women and children of color in St. Louis. "We, along with the community, are excited to bring such an important part of our history back to life," said Alderwoman Dionne Flowers, a champion of both this annual event and the historical Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing site, which is located in her ward. Open to all ages, this event is free, and is a partnership of the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, Great Rivers Greenway, the City of St. Louis, the National Black Tourism Network, the Historic Daniel Boone Home & Heritage Center, Youth and Family Center, Lincoln University and Lindenwood University. Additional sponsors include the Missouri Department of Tourism.

For more information, visit www.MaryMeachum.org. About Great Rivers Greenway: Great Rivers Greenway makes the St. Louis region a more vibrant place to live, work and play by developing a network of greenways to connect people to their rivers, parks and communities. For more information, visit www.GreatRiversGreenway.org.