



Area Residents Invited to Experience Local History at 11th Annual Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing Celebration on May 18th

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In honor of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, the event will feature a reenactment titled, "Slave to Citizen Soldier: Life After the Emancipation Proclamation"

On Saturday, May 18, 2013, at 11:00 a.m., area residents are invited to watch local history come alive as Missouri's first national Underground Railroad site, the historic Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing, is transformed into a Civil War military camp. In honor of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, the free event will highlight the experiences recently emancipated black slaves had enlisting in the Union Army during the Civil War. The replica recruitment camp will look very similar to what the public would have seen in 1863 in and around Benton Barracks, the largest Union Army training camp in Missouri during the Civil War and the largest African-American recruitment and induction site from Ohio to California. At its height, 24,000 men were on the grounds of Benton Barracks, which was located on what is now known as Fairgrounds Park.

"Many St. Louisans are unaware that Benton Barracks was located on what is now known as Fairgrounds Park," said Angela da Silva, Adjunct Professor at Lindenwood University and reenactor director responsible for creating the replica recruitment camp. "We are excited to be able to bring such an important part of our history back to life at the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing site, and we encourage everyone to come out and get a sense of what life was like during the latter stages of the Civil War, especially for the men of color who made that transformation from slave to citizen soldier."

The Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing site is located by the Riverfront Trail on the banks of the Mississippi River, just north of Merchant's Bridge in North St. Louis City. The event will begin when the Blue Gray Alliance in authentic Civil War uniforms arrive to pitch their tents and build campfires on the evening of Friday, May 17. The next day, the camp will come to life with historical figures, such as Abraham Lincoln; Frederick Douglass, leader of the abolitionist movement; 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 Elizabeth Keckley, a former St. Louis slave who became an activist and gained fame as a professional dressmaker and confidante of Mary Todd Lincoln.

The event will also feature cavalry units with horses, a cannon, period games for children, an example of a Freedman school, a 19th century medicine show, choirs, and an 1863 fashion show. The highlight event of the day will honor Lincoln University, which owes its founding to contributions made by the Black 62nd and 65th regiments organized at Benton Barracks. Everyone is also invited to a barn dance, which will conclude the event festivities.

This event is free, and sponsors include Great Rivers Greenway, Youth and Family Center, the National Black Tourism Network, the City of St. Louis, St. Louis Public Library, Lincoln University, Lindenwood University, and the Daniel Boone Home and Heritage Center.

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About Great Rivers Greenway

Great Rivers Greenway was created by a vote of the people in 2000 with the goal of making the St. Louis region a better place to live. The public organization is carrying out the desires of the public by connecting an interconnected system of trails and greenways, designed to connect communities, provide transportation alternatives, preserve nature, improve health and increase the economic vitality of the region. Great Rivers Greenway includes St. Louis City and County and St. Charles County. For more information, visit www.grgstl.org.