

Freedom to Equality Tours Kick Off in May

by Stephanie Tate

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FREEDOM TO EQUALITY TOURS



**Guided shuttle tours showcasing
African-American History in Alton, IL**

ALTON – April 19, 2024) Take a journey through Black History in the historic river town of Alton on the ‘Freedom to Equality’ tours offered by the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau. Tickets are available now for tours which begin in May and run through November.

Tours are scheduled for May 18, June 8, July 20, Aug. 24, Sept. 21, Oct. 19 and Nov. 16. All tours take place on Saturdays at 10 a.m. Jared Hennings, an instructor at Lewis & Clark Community College, will lead each tour.

The 22-passenger shuttle tours begin at the Alton Visitor Center, 200 Piasa St. Tickets are \$35.00 per person and must be purchased in advance and online at: <https://www.riversandroutes.com/things-to-do/buy-tickets/>

“The Alton region has an impressive Underground Railroad history coupled with a powerful and inspiring quest for African-American equality over the years,” Cory Jobe, President/CEO of the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau noted. “We believe in honoring that history and preserving its place in our storytelling efforts. These new tours bring that part of the region’s history to life and people are able to see for themselves the places and people who left their mark on Alton.”

The tours highlight Black History in Alton beginning with the famed Underground Railroad and following history through the fight for civil liberties and includes the cultural contributions that shaped not only Alton but the United States.

Stops include Rocky Fork Church where the history of this large-scale Underground Railroad station outside of Alton is uncovered. This community is now part of a registry of verified Underground Railroad locations. The shuttle will also stop at the Alton Cemetery, the final resting place of many notable abolitionists and African-American leaders in the community. It is also home to the iconic Elijah P. Lovejoy monument, the tallest monument in Illinois, honoring this famed abolitionist minister and newspaper publisher.

The tour highlights notable African-American Alton residents including Charles Newton, the first Black graduate of Alton High School in 1873, Scott Bibb, a former slave, who battled for public school integration in Alton and Josephine Beckwith who fought to secure equality for African-American youths and adults. The tours end with a look at the life of jazz great Miles Davis who was born in Alton.

As the guide for the tours, Mr. Hennings brings the historical figures to life with re-enactments, stories and through song.

Another stop on the tour is the famed Union Baptist Church, one of the oldest Black churches in Illinois. It was populated by free Blacks and organized in 1836. The church hosted a statewide colored convention in 1856 which led to the downfall of the Black Code.

The Alton region is part of the National Park Service's "Network to Freedom" passport program. A passport stamp honors the Underground Railroad Sites in Alton and Godfrey. Passport holders can have their passports stamped at the Alton Visitor Center or Hayner Genealogy & Local History Library in downtown Alton.

For more information on the Freedom to Equality Tours, please contact the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Bureau at (618) 465-6676 or go to www.RiversandRoutes.com.