



For Immediate Release

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MISSOURI'S FIRST NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED UNDERGROUND RAILROAD SITE HOSTS TENTH ANNUAL FREEDOM CROSSING CELEBRATION

Great Rivers Greenway Co-Sponsors Free Festival Featuring Slave Escape Reenactment

St. Louis, Mo., May 9, 2011... On Saturday, May 21, St. Louis residents can watch local history come alive as the tale of an urban slave escape is reenacted right on the banks of the Mississippi River. From noon to 4 p.m., area residents are invited to attend the tenth annual Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing Celebration, commemorating a small group of slaves' heroic attempt to escape across the Mississippi River from Missouri into the free state of Illinois on May 21, 1855. The site of the escape, the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing, is Missouri's first nationally recognized Underground Railroad site.

The "flight to freedom" 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. Attendees of the FREE event will enjoy gospel music, cultural acts, bike rides, food vendors and a historical exhibit. The actual reenactment will take place at 2 p.m., complete with costumed participants traveling in secret compartments on wagons to the staging point and a pursuing posse on horseback.

The annual reenactment brings to light the struggles and dangers African-American slaves faced in their fight for freedom. Attendees will get to experience this fight first-hand as they watch the reenactment of the historical daring crossing. The pursuit of freedom had been conducted by Mary Meachum, a free woman of color and widow of John Berry Meachum, known nationally for liberating slaves. As the group of nine enslaved African-Americans, led by Meachum, approached the Illinois shore, they were met by a sheriff and owners. Shots were fired and five were caught, including a woman named Esther. She belonged to Henry Shaw, the founder of the Missouri Botanical Gardens, and was "sold down river" to Vicksburg, Miss., without her children as punishment.

Grace Hill Settlement House has been leading the effort to developing the Mary Meachum Underground Railroad site into a national tourist destination. Anticipated site design is near completion, and once finalized, the site will be an important source of cultural pride that will benefit North St. Louis communities. To learn more about the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing, call Doug Eller at 314-584-6703.

"We are thrilled to be one of the sponsors for this educational, thought-provoking, fun event that will be an excellent outing for families and St. Louis area residents," said Susan Trautman, executive director of Great Rivers Greenway. "We encourage everyone to come out to the festival, especially pedestrians and bicyclists who may already be utilizing the nearby Riverfront Trail that day."

About Great Rivers Greenway:

Great Rivers Greenway is a public organization developing an interconnected system of trails and greenways to make the region a better place to live. These linear green spaces link neighborhoods and communities, increase the economic vitality of the region, preserve nature, provide transportation alternatives, and improve health. Great Rivers Greenway includes St. Louis City and County and St. Charles County. For more information, visit www.grgstl.org.

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**Editors Note: Directions to the festival are as follows: Take Hwy 70 to Grand Ave.; go east toward the Mississippi River to where Grand Ave. curves left to become Hall Street. Continue a ¼ mile to Prairie St. Look for a Fire Department giant American Flag and Riverfront Trail sign and turn right into the parking area.*