

Emancipation Proclamation on display

Handwritten 1862 draft sets date for freeing slaves in the South.

Staff report

Abraham Lincoln's handwritten first version of the Emancipation Proclamation — which set slaves on the road to freedom — will be on display Sept. 27 at the Oncenter in Syracuse.

The document, called the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, will be on public view from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

Issued on Sept. 22, 1862, during the Civil War, this text marks the first time Lincoln set a date for freeing slaves in 11 states of the Confederacy, if the states failed to return to the Union.

The document is part of a statewide traveling exhibition, "The First Step to Freedom: Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation," marking its 150th anniversary. At one time, the proclamation was owned by Central New York abolitionist Gerritt Smith.

The exhibition also will include the original manuscript of a speech by Martin Luther King Jr. delivered in 1962 in

observance of the Emancipation Proclamation's 100th anniversary.

The Onondaga Historical Association is organizing the Syracuse stop of the exhibition's eight-city statewide tour. The New York State Museum used collections and images from the New York State Library and the New York State Archives for the exhibition.

"I hope that everyone in our community will make every effort to view this exhibit and the history-making documents it includes during its stop here in Syracuse," said OHA Executive Director Gregg Tripoli.

The city's showing is the third in the series of one-day exhibits that begin Sept. 19 in Albany and includes New York City, Buffalo, Long Island, Plattsburgh, Rochester and Binghamton.

The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was issued 150 years ago as America was

engaged in the Civil War. On Sept. 22, 1862, five days after a Union victory at the Battle of Antietam, Lincoln issued a Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation as a military order. He declared all slaves within Rebel territory — the 11 states of the Confederacy — would be freed on Jan. 1, 1863, unless the states returned to the Union.

On New Year's Day 1863, Lincoln signed the final Emancipation Proclamation. The handwritten 1862 Preliminary Proclamation is the only surviving copy of the document in Lincoln's hand. The president donated it to the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which raffled the document at an Albany Army Relief Association Fair in 1864. Central New York abolitionist Gerritt Smith won it. The state Legislature

later bought the document, which survived the State Capitol fire of 1911.

After the signing of the final proclamation, African-American residents in Syracuse wanted to celebrate with an "Emancipation Jubilee" at City Hall, but the request was denied because of expectations of trouble from local foes of Lincoln, according to OHA curator Dennis Connors. The celebration was moved to the Wesleyan Methodist Church on Columbus Circle, which today is the Mission Restaurant.

On Sept. 12, 1962, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a speech to the New York State Civil War Centennial Commission. He said descendants of slaves still were waiting for full civil rights.

"He argued that the document proved that government could be a powerful force for

The details

What: An exhibition of Abraham Lincoln's handwritten 1862 Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation and an original manuscript of a speech given by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1962 on the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

When: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sept. 27 Onondaga Historical Association Executive Director Gregg Tripoli will welcome visitors during a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 9 a.m.

Where: Nicholas J. Pirro Convention Center (Oncenter), 800 S. State St.

Admission: Free.

social justice and urged Gov. Nelson Rockefeller and President John F. Kennedy to hasten integration and progress toward full civil rights," according to an OHA press release.