



news

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Sep 25, 2012

LINCOLN'S PRELIMINARY EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION TO TRAVEL STATEWIDE TO MARK 150TH ANNIVERSARY

Destiny USA sponsors the historic documents arrival in Syracuse

To mark the sesquicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, a traveling offer an unprecedented display of the document, written in Lincoln's own hand, in eight cities across State. FOR ONE DAY ONLY, September 27, 2012, *The First Step to Freedom: Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation* exhibition will come to central New York at the Nicholas J. Pirro Convention Center, 100 S. State Street, Syracuse, NY, part of The Oncenter, from 9 a.m to 9 p.m. Also central to this exhibition is a copy of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation facilitated for the central New York region by Onondaga Historical Association, will be Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s original manuscript of a speech he delivered in 1962 in celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation centennial. The documents included in this exhibition stand as important markers in the path to free African Americans and are among New York State's greatest treasures. Sponsors for the exhibit include Wegmans, Wegmans USA, Polaris Library Systems, and the Allyn Foundation. The exhibit is free and open to the public.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony will be held at 9 a.m., September 27 at the entrance to the exhibit at the Nicholas J. Pirro Convention Center. In attendance will be state and local officials. Welcoming remarks will be by Onondaga Historical Association Executive Director Gregg Tripoli.

The First Step to Freedom: Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation exhibition was developed by the New York State Museum using collections and images from the New York State Library, New York State Archives with the intention of having these unique documents available for viewing by the public in every region across the state. The exhibit launches a three-year commemoration of the sesquicentennial of the Civil War and Lincoln's issuance of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862.

The two documents - both in the collections of the New York State Education Department, Office of Cultural Education—will go on display for the first time together in this exhibition to mark the 150th anniversary of two of American history's defining moments. *The First Step to Freedom: Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation* exhibition text was written by John B. King Jr., New York State Education Commissioner Mohammad, Director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and Lincoln scholar Healy. The exhibition was designed and developed by the New York State Museum using collections and images from the New York State Archives.

New York State Library and the New York State Archives.

The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation was issued one hundred fifty years ago as the nation was engaged in what Abraham Lincoln called "a great civil war." The bloody conflict was unleashed by decades of growing discord over the issue of American slavery. On September 22, 1862, five days after a Union victory at the Battle of Antietam, Lincoln, citing his power as Commander in Chief, issued a Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation as a military order. Lincoln's order declared that all slaves held within Rebel territory—the eleven states of the Southern Confederacy—would be freed on January 1, 1863, unless they returned to the Union.

On New Year's Day, 1863, 100 days later, Lincoln signed the final Emancipation Proclamation.

Lincoln's handwritten 1862 Preliminary Proclamation is the only surviving copy of this document in the President's hand. Lincoln donated it to the U.S. Sanitary [Commission](#) which raffled the document at an Albany Army Relief Association Fair in 1864, where it was won by abolitionist hero Gerrit Smith, and later purchased by the New York State Legislature. Though Lincoln's final proclamation burned in the Chicago fire, this Preliminary Proclamation survived the State Capitol fire of 1911 and has been preserved by the State Library.

On September 12, 1962, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered the speech contained in the exhibition to the New York State Civil War Centennial Commission. Dr. King contended that the descendants of slaves were still waiting for full civil rights. He argued that the document proved that government could be a powerful force for social justice and urged Governor Nelson Rockefeller and President John F. Kennedy to hasten integration and progress towards full civil rights.

State Education Commissioner John B. King, Jr. said, "America was born with a declaration that all men are created equal. Yet it was not until President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union achieved victory in the Civil War, and the 13th Amendment was added to the U.S. Constitution -- almost 100 years after our nation's founding -- that people of African descent who were brought here as slaves gained their freedom."

King continued, "At the centennial anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of the importance of the document, arguing that the Emancipation Proclamation proved that government could be a powerful force for social justice. And the 150th anniversary, which we are celebrating now, is an important reminder that America remains a work in progress. We put this exhibit together so that all New Yorkers can be inspired by these treasures preserved in the State Education Department's collections."

Regents Chancellor Merryl H. Tisch said, "The documents on display today are two of the most historically and socially significant treasures from the Education Department collections -- treasures that we are so proud to be able to share with the public." Tisch continued, "These documents are tangible connections to our past, showing just how far our state and country have progressed in the last 150 years."

Dennis Connors, Curator of History at Onondaga Historical Association, stated that Syracuse's numerous abolitionists greeted the Proclamation's signing as a major, but not final victory in the war against slavery. As an example of the struggle still to come, Connors noted that, "Syracuse's African-American population wished to hold an 'Emancipation Jubilee' at City Hall shortly after Lincoln's signing." But city officials declined, fearing trouble from local opponents to Lincoln's administration. The celebration was held, instead, at the Wesleyan Methodist Church, which still stands on Columbus Circle as the Mission Restaurant. Connors remarked that, "Syracuse is fortunate to have a landmark still standing with a direct connection to that momentous celebration of freedom."

Gregg Tripoli, executive director of OHA stated that "OHA is incredibly honored to be chosen as the local host of this amazing exhibit. OHA has a long history of collaboration with the New York State Museum in our joint efforts to

highlight the rich and compelling history of our community, our state, and our country. Syracuse's proud tradition in the fight for civil rights, especially in the abolitionist cause, makes our city a particularly appropriate location for this exhibit in central New York. However, it will also draw attention to the work that is yet to be accomplished in our community, as well as in others, before we reach the point of true equality and mutual respect in our society. 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."

A related exhibit, *An Irrepressible Conflict: The Empire State in the Civil War*, commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Civil War opens September 19 at the New York State Museum in Albany. This 6,500-square-foot exhibition chronicles the pivotal role New York State played in the war and will be open through September 22, 2013. Onondaga Historical Association has loaned seven artifacts to *An Irrepressible Conflict* at the State Museum.

For more information on the central New York stop of *The First Step to Freedom: Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation*, contact Lynne Pascale, Director of Development at OHA at 428-1864, ext. 314, lynne.pascale@cnyhistory.org, or visit the State Education website, EngageNY.org. The Nicholas J. Pirro Convention Center at The Oncenter is located at 800 S. State Street, Syracuse, NY, 13202.

The First Step to Freedom: Abraham Lincoln's Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation
Exhibition Schedule

September 19	Albany - New York State Capitol - Exhibit opens
September 21- 24	New York City - Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
September 27	Syracuse - The On Center (Host: Onondaga Historical Association)
October 5 – 6	Buffalo - Burchfield-Penney Art Center
October 15 – 16	Long Island - CW Post Tilles Center
October 19	Plattsburgh - Plattsburgh State College Art Center
October 27 – 28	Rochester - Rochester Museum and Science Center
November 1	Binghamton - Roberson Museum
November TBD	Albany - New York State Museum

**THE FIRST STEP TO
FREEDOM**

Abraham Lincoln's
Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation

**September 27, 2012
9AM – 9PM**

Free and Open to the Public

Nicholas J. Pirro Convention Center
800 South State Street, Syracuse
<http://www.oce.nysed.gov/ep/>

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