

ESTABLISHED 1907



FRAUNCES TAVERN® MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Vastly Expanded Permanent Exhibition Highlighting the Role of Fraunces Tavern in One of the Largest Emancipations of Black People Prior to the American Civil War

The Birch Trials at Fraunces Tavern Opening October 23, 2024

Ahead of schedule, we are able to now include this preview photo of this important exhibit for your use.



NEW YORK, NY – On October 23, 2024, Fraunces Tavern Museum, located in the oldest building in Manhattan, will unveil a vastly enlarged permanent exhibition entitled "The Birch Trials at Fraunces Tavern." The exhibition highlights the role of Fraunces Tavern in the emancipation of thousands of Black Loyalists at the end of the Revolutionary War (enabling

them to leave New York City) and in the creation of the Book of Negroes (the record created of those who departed with the British). The exhibition expands upon one opened at the Museum in June 2023. Recognition is also given to the thousands of Black Patriots who fought to further the cause of American Independence. The previous exhibition attracted a multitude of visitors from around the world, including large numbers of school children. Relocating the exhibition to a larger permanent gallery will enable the Museum to provide a better visitor experience as well as include recent new discoveries of significant information concerning the identities of individuals participating in the Birch Trials and their inclusion in the Book of Negroes.

The exhibition reflects several years of exhaustive research on both sides of the Atlantic in thousands of pages of existing original documents. Museum and Art Committee Co-Chairman and Chief Curator of the exhibition, Craig Hamilton Weaver, emphasizes that "this exhibition is the most comprehensive ever organized on this tremendously significant event in the history of Black emancipation in the United States and is made all the more compelling because it can be viewed within the very walls of the building within which the events occurred."

In 1783, as the Revolutionary War was drawing to a close, a joint British and American Commission met weekly at Fraunces Tavern from April until November. The proceedings of the Commission are known as "the Birch Trials," named after Brigadier General Samuel Birch who oversaw the proceedings. The Commission reviewed and deliberated upon the eligibility of some Black Loyalists to evacuate with the British Army. Testimonies were provided by individuals in person and through documentary evidence to enable the Commissioners to render final decisions. Given the facts that the Commissioners met at Fraunces Tavern weekly and had the responsibility "to superintend all embarkation" it is reasonable to conclude that the British and American Commissioners reviewed and compiled the lists of names for inclusion in the Book of Negroes during the course of their weekly sessions at Fraunces Tavern. The names would later be inscribed neatly into the final Book of Negroes by staff.

Visitors to the exhibition will observe chairs and a table arranged as if waiting for the Commissioners to enter the room and hear cases. The exhibition also contains reproductions of pages from the Book of Negroes as well as the advertisement in the May 30, 1783 New York Gazette stating that the Commissioners would meet at Fraunces Tavern. Recent discoveries featured in this newly expanded exhibition include the identities of two women, Dinah Archey and Judith Jackson, whose fates were undecided by the Commission at their hearings, but who ultimately were recorded in the Book of Negroes as having evacuated New York City on departing ships.

Major support for this exhibition has been provided by the **Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation** (www.rdlqfoundation.org). The purpose of the **Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation** is to educate, cultivate and encourage the study and understanding of Long Island and New York's historic role in the American experience. The Foundation also supports scholarships and historic preservation, including study, stewardship and promotion of Long Island's historic educational aspects. The **Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation** remains inspired by Robert David Lion Gardiner's personal passion for Long Island and New York history.

Media invited to attend a preview reception:

A preview reception will be held on Wednesday, October 23, at 6:30 p.m., at Fraunces Tavern Museum, 54 Pearl Street. For more information or to RSVP for the reception, please contact Sophia Hall at 212-425-1776 or shall@frauncestavernmuseum.org.

About Fraunces Tavern:

Fraunces Tavern, at 54 Pearl Street, was constructed in 1719, and restored by its owner, Sons of the RevolutionSM in the State of New York, Inc., to its 18th Century appearance in the early 1900s. It is the oldest building in Manhattan. Today, a restaurant (a tenant of Sons of the RevolutionSM in the State of New York, Inc.) operates on the lower levels, and Fraunces Tavern Museum operates on its upper levels.

About Fraunces Tavern Museum:

Fraunces Tavern Museum's mission is to preserve and interpret the history of the American Revolutionary era through public education. This mission is fulfilled through the interpretation and preservation of the Museum's collections, landmarked buildings, and varied public programs that serve the community.

Featured in the opening scenes of the musical "Hamilton" as the meeting place of the Sons of Liberty, Fraunces Tavern boasts the original "rooms where it happened." Today, guests can visit the rooms where General George Washington bid farewell to his officers and where John Jay negotiated treaties with foreign nations. Additional galleries focus on America's War for Independence and the preservation of early American history.

Fraunces Tavern® Museum is owned and operated by, and FRAUNCES TAVERN® is a registered service mark of, Sons of the RevolutionSM in the State of New York, Inc., a Section 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation instituted in 1876 and incorporated in 1884. Copyright © 2024 SRNY, Inc. All rights reserved. To learn more, visit our website at frauncestavernmuseum.org.

Exhibition website:

<https://www.frauncestavernmuseum.org/birch-trials-at-fraunces-tavern>

#

Press Contact:

Scott Dwyer
communications@frauncestavernmuseum.org
212.425.1779