

# 10th Annual Celebration MARY MEACHUM FREEDOM CROSSING

Missouri's First Nationally Recognized Underground Railroad Site  
by the Riverfront Trail on the Banks of the Mississippi River

## 12noon to 4pm, Saturday, May 5th

10:30am Freedom Bike Ride registration - ride leaves at 11am  
A 9-mile bicycle ride on trails and city streets



### *A Tale of an Urban Slave Escape*

A Fully Costumed 1855 Reenactment - 3:00pm

Live Music | Cultural Acts | Free Bikes to Ride | Food Vendors | Exhibits



Take Hwy 70 to Grand Ave; go east toward Mississippi River to where Grand curves left to become Hall Street; continue ¼ mile to next street (Prairie); look for a Fire Department giant American flag & Riverfront Trail sign; turn right to Parking Area

For more information: [www.confluencegreenway.org](http://www.confluencegreenway.org) or Doug Eller 314-484-3015

**THANKS** to our Special Sponsors, this is a **FREE** Event!



## The Confluence Partnership Presents

### The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing Celebration Missouri's First Nationally Recognized Underground Railroad Site

#### Summary of This 1855 Underground Railroad Event In North St. Louis:

The site of a 'flight to freedom' is located on a Mississippi River bank in North St. Louis City, "a short distance above Bissell's Ferry", where a party of 9 enslaved African Americans launched a skiff in the early hours of May 21, 1855. Their goal was freedom; their immediate destination, Illinois, the 'free' state across the Mississippi River. Despite the 96 degree day, 22-year-old Ben had left his owner's Clayton Road estate wearing a black suit, vest, tie, and soft black fur hat – clothing for a proud man heading for freedom. The pursuit of freedom had been 'conducted' by Mary Meachum, a free woman of color and widow of John Berry Meachum, an African American known nationally for liberating slaves. Contemporary newspapers reported that the freedom-seekers were met on the Illinois shore by a sheriff and owners. Shots were fired and five were caught. Mary Meachum was arrested for running an "underground railway depot" in her St. Louis home. Freeman, an "abolitionist agent", was reportedly shot that night. Esther, one of the escaping slaves, was re-captured and 'sold down river' to Vicksburg without her children by her owner, Henry Shaw, the founder of the Missouri Botanical Gardens. (The complete application to the National Park Service with 19th century references substantiating the occurrences that night is available upon request, based on research provided by Dr. Kristin Zapalac of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.)

#### Development of the Mary Meachum Freedom Crossing Site:

Today the spot from which that skiff was launched looks much as it did in 1855. To the south a railway bridge (Merchants) has replaced the ferry, but the site itself is vacant as it was then, largely untouched by the commerce the bridge would bring. Its location on the river side of a pedestrian and bicycle pathway, the Riverfront Trail, assures that it will remain accessible to both local residents and tourists. Its size suits it for re-enactments, family gatherings, and celebrations of the Freedom Crossing, and its importance is worthy of a national tourist destination. St. Louis regional partners are in the midst of developing the Mary Meachum Underground Railroad site into this national tourist destination and an important source of cultural pride that can benefit North St. Louis communities. Sincere Appreciation goes to the site design supporters: Great Rivers Greenway District, The Confluence Partnership, and the National Park Service. Over 300 neighborhood people and local leaders have attended workshops for this community-driven process. The design team led by H3 Studio synthesized the community's desires and with reverence to the events of May 21, 1855 developed a schematic design and site development plan. Additionally, the AmeriCorps Trail Rangers provided presentations to another 4000 people. During the entire process. The Logos School has continually enriched the site with interpretive murals (below). The site design is completed and will be featured at the Celebration. The 10th Annual Celebration of the event on May 5, 2012, is expected to draw 500 people.



**For More Information: Doug Eller 314-484-3015 or [www.confluencegreenway.org](http://www.confluencegreenway.org)**

**What is the Underground Railroad?** Occurring before and during the Civil War in 1861, the 'Underground Railroad' was the loosely organized escape of 1000's of African American slaves traveling from Southern slave-holding states to free Northern states and Canada. The term 'Underground' refers to the secrecy of the activity, which broke U.S. law, and often resulted in severe punishment for slaves if re-captured. The term 'Railroad' refers to the most commonly used routes that slaves, and the black and white persons who helped them, used to reach freedom. Remember, however, that the vast majority of freedom seekers escaped slavery on their own, making choices to trust people for help along the way. The Underground Railroad's memory is important to all Americans who value freedom.