

For Immediate Release

**RE: Four States Joining in the John Brown Sesquicentennial Commemoration**

In 2009, John Brown's raid of Harpers Ferry on October 16, 1859 will become the focal point of almost one hundred different commemorative activities in a four state area, marking the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the event.

For most of that 150 years, historians have debated the importance of John Brown's raid on the federal arsenal in an attempt to free the slaves. The Virginia Civil War Sesquicentennial Commission is so sure of its importance, that they have marked the event as the kick-off to the commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Civil War.

While Harpers Ferry certainly is the focal point of the commemorative events, communities in a four state area of Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Maryland will participate in events important to their connections to John Brown and the infamous raid.

Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, for instance, will tell the story of their connection to John Brown. Frederick Douglass and John Brown met at Chambersburg in an old quarry prior to the raid. At that time, Douglass declined an invitation to join the raid, telling Brown he was about the fall into "The Perfect Steel Trap".

Many of John Brown's supplies were shipped via the railroad to a warehouse in Chambersburg. One of John Brown's men, John Cook, who escaped, was captured near Mont Alto, Pennsylvania, just east of Chambersburg and was held overnight in the Franklin County jail. The Cook monument will be rededicated in 2009.

Chambersburg is also the site of the John Brown House, where many of the raiders congregated prior to the raid. That's where Mrs. Ritner's boarding house was (now called the John Brown House4). She was an avowed abolitionist and an important conductor for the Underground Railroad. Mrs. Ritner also aided several of the raiders who escaped from Harpers Ferry when the soldiers surrounded John Brown and his men in the engine house.

Frederick, Maryland will host events commemorating the call-up of militia units from Frederick fire companies, to quell the disturbance at Harpers Ferry. Hagerstown, Maryland will focus on the visit of John Brown and his sons to a local hotel prior to the raid and to activities in southern Washington County at the Kennedy Farm.

The Kennedy Farm was rented by John Brown in July 1859. It was from this farmhouse that the raid was planned. Captain Brown and his raiders walked from the farmhouse on October 16, 1859 to Harpers Ferry at the start of the raid.

That march will be recreated on October 16, the actual 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary date of the original event.

Nearby Charles Town, WV (Charlestown, VA at the time of the raid) will have activities to educate visitors about the trial of John Brown held at the Jefferson County Courthouse in Charles Town and the execution, held several blocks from the courthouse. Lectures and dramatic readings will take place throughout the year. Special events will also be held on December 2, the date of John Brown's hanging, and on December 16, when four other raiders were hanged. A two act play "Sword and the Spirit"

depicting John Brown's letters to his wife, Mary, will be performed. And tours of the Blessing House will be available. John Blessing was a local man who befriended John Brown while the abolitionist leader was in jail in Charles Town.

At Harpers Ferry, Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and the Harpers Ferry Foundation will host many activities during 2009 including an academic symposium, dramatic reading of "John Brown's Body", special walking tours, book signings, a teacher workshop and more.

Throughout the year, re-enactors will portray Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and Frederick Douglass. Descendents of the participants in the actual event will be honored as they return to the scene of the conflict.

An exhibit to Fontaine Beckham, Mayor of Harpers Ferry and one of the casualties of the raid, will be opened at the Harpers Ferry Train Station. An exhibit to the "Secret Six" will be opened in the national park, commemorating the six men from Boston who were abolitionists and funded John Brown's activities.

Luke Quinn, a U.S. Marine and the only soldier who died in the raid, will be honored with activities during the year.

For a complete list of all activities including times of the events and contact information, visit the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary website at [www.johnbrownhf.com](http://www.johnbrownhf.com) or call Jefferson County Convention and Visitors Bureau at 1-866HELLO-WV.

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