

For Immediate Release

RE: John Brown Raid Sesquicentennial events to cover most of 2009

If you think John Brown and his raid is ancient history think again and consider this. In 2005, a historical marker was placed in Harpers Ferry by the NAACP honoring John Brown as “an heroic martyr”. In 2007, a daguerreotype of John Brown sold at auction for \$97,500. In 2008, the grave of Annie Brown, one of John Brown’s daughters, was finally found in Eureka, California following a serious search by the family of over a dozen years. She was Brown’s only child whose grave had not been located.

Now consider this. October 16, 2009, is the 150th anniversary of the John Brown raid in Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia). There are almost 100 events already planned in West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania to commemorate that event which many historians consider as “the first shots of the American Civil War.

A new website has been established, giving information about the events of the Sesquicentennial at www.johnbrownhf.com That website provides contact information and will be updated throughout the year as additional activities are planned.

The focus on John Brown will span the whole year, and will include activities by non-profit organizations, local historical groups, and of course, the National Park service at Harpers Ferry National Historical Park.

Events will educate the public about tie-ins in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania to most of the raiders, to the shipment of Brown’s supplies by rail to a Chambersburg warehouse, and then to aiding several of the raiders who escaped from Harpers Ferry. Chambersburg also was the site of the famous meeting between John Brown and Frederick Douglass in which Douglass refused to go along. Douglass told John Brown that he would be walking into “The Perfect Steel Trap” and that federal troops would capture anyone trying to take over a federal arsenal in five minutes. Although Brown lasted about 32 hours at Harpers Ferry, Douglass’ prediction turned out to be true.

Other events will take place in Frederick and Hagerstown, Maryland. Both communities were also tied into the raid. In Frederick, three militia units affiliated with Frederick fire companies were called up to help quell the disturbances in nearby Harpers Ferry the morning of October 17, 1859. South of Hagerstown, at the Kennedy Farm, John Brown and his raiders prepared for and planned the logistics of the raid. On October 16, 1859, they walked from the farm across the train bridge and into Harpers Ferry to begin their attempt to capture the guns at the federal arsenal to help free the slaves.

Charlestown, Virginia, (now Charles Town, West Virginia) was the site of both the trial of John Brown and the raiders and the site of their executions. Events throughout 2009 will tell the story of the trials through a series of lectures and discussions. Special attention will be given to the five colored raiders with John Brown in programs offered by the Jefferson County Black History Preservation Society.

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park will be the site of the majority of the 2009 events. “In the Footsteps of John Brown” is a two hour walking tour held most Sundays in 2009 to take people to lower town sites. Throughout the year, re-enactors will depict Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson and Frederick Douglass. An academic symposium and a teacher’s workshop will be held on the topic of John Brown. Discussions, dramatic readings, book singings, and other events will be held. Special exhibits will feature Fontaine Beckham, Harpers Ferry Mayor and a casualty of the raid and “The

Secret Six”, abolitionists from the Boston area who funded John Brown’s activities.

On the weekend of October 16, a variety of activities will take place on the actual anniversary of the raid, featuring descendents of many of the participants.

A special website has been set up to give you details of all the events including contact information. The website will be updated on a regular basis as new activities are planned. Please visit the website at www.johnbrownhf.com Or call Jefferson County Convention and Visitors Bureau for details at 1-866-HELLO-WV.