

ESTABLISHED 1907



FRAUNCES TAVERN® MUSEUM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**NEW PERMANENT EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHTS THE ROLE OF FRAUNCES TAVERN
IN THE CULMINATING EVENT IN ONE OF THE LARGEST EMANCIPATIONS OF BLACK
PEOPLE PRIOR TO THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR**

***"THE BIRCH TRIALS AT FRAUNCES TAVERN"
OPENS AT FRAUNCES TAVERN® MUSEUM IN NEW YORK CITY ON JUNE 27, 2023***



NEW YORK, NY – On June 27, 2023, Fraunces Tavern Museum—located in the oldest building in Manhattan—will unveil a new permanent exhibition that highlights the role of Fraunces Tavern in the evacuation of thousands of Black Loyalists from New York City at the end of the Revolutionary War, the culminating event in one of the largest emancipations of Black people prior to the American Civil War. This chapter in the history of Fraunces Tavern adds to the many significant Revolutionary era events for which Fraunces Tavern is already well-known: a meeting place of the Sons of Liberty in the run-up to war breaking out (as depicted in the hit

musical "Hamilton"), the site of General George Washington's farewell to his officers at the end of the War, and—in the early years of the Republic—the new Nation's first executive office building, housing the Department of Foreign Affairs (now called the Department of State), then led by John Jay, the Department of War, then led by Henry Knox, and the Board of Treasury. In 1783, as the Revolutionary War drew to a close, a joint British and American commission—formed as part of the process to implement the peace—met at Fraunces Tavern to review and deliberate upon the eligibility of some Black Loyalists to evacuate with the British Army. Testimonies were provided by interested persons alongside documentary evidence for the commission to render a decision. These proceedings are now referred to as the "Birch Trials," named after British Brigadier General Samuel Birch, Commander of the 17th Regiment of Light Dragoons and Commandant of New York, appointed to oversee them.

The Birch Trials were part of a process whereby 3,000 Black Loyalists evacuated New York City between April and November 1783, many of whom had previously been enslaved. The names of Black Loyalists who qualified for evacuation were recorded in the Book of Negroes, the compilation of which was overseen by the commission.

This new permanent exhibition, located within Fraunces Tavern Museum's Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Educational Center for American History, will highlight these significant events. Visitors will enter the exhibition and observe chairs and a table, arranged as if waiting for the commissioners to enter and hear a case. Along the exhibition's walls, art and written communications of the period will highlight the role of Black Loyalists in the Revolutionary War.

"The Birch Trials were a significant event in the long and continuing story of Americans of African descent in the United States. Although the story of these individuals has been told, including by our own Museum, it is still not widely known by the public. We hope this new permanent exhibition will change that," explained Ambrose M. Richardson III, Co-Chairman of the Museum and Art Committee.

Museum and Art Committee Co-Chairman Craig Weaver emphasized that, "The exhibition reflects two years of exhaustive research on both sides of the Atlantic into thousands of pages of existing original documentation, and provides the most comprehensive insight to date into this significant event in the history of Black emancipation in the United States."

The new exhibition also recognizes the thousands of Black Patriots who fought to further the cause of American Independence. For example: Crispus Attucks, a Black sailor killed in the

Boston Massacre, who is thought by many historians to be the first American to die in the rebellion; Peter Salem and Salem Poor, who were recognized for their valor in the Battle of Bunker Hill; James Armistead, who served in a unit commanded by French General Lafayette and provided intelligence on the British positions at Yorktown that was crucial to the American victory; and the 1st Rhode Island Regiment—including a large and visible body of Black soldiers, both free and previously enslaved—who fought bravely during the War, most notably at the Battle of Newport, Rhode Island.

This exhibition is an important addition to the narrative of the Revolutionary War and its aftermath, and provides powerful visuals and significant historical content for visitors.

Media invited to attend a preview reception:

A preview reception will be held on Monday, June 26, at 6:30 p.m., at Fraunces Tavern Museum, 54 Pearl Street. The exhibit opens to the general public on June 27, 2023 with \$1 admission to the Museum all day. For more information or to RSVP for the reception, please contact:

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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 © 2023 SRNY, Inc. All rights reserved. To learn more, visit our website at [frauncestavernmuseum.org](https://www.frauncestavernmuseum.org).

Exhibition website:

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

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