

News Release from Skidmore College

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Community invited to celebrate Solomon Northup Day, July 19

A celebration of freedom featuring scholars, historians, films, youth activities, and more

The 16th annual Solomon Northup Day, an afternoon of activities inspired by a powerful memoir of enslavement and eventual freedom, will take place on Saturday, July 19, 12:30-6 p.m. in Filene Recital Hall at Skidmore College.

The story of Solomon Northup, a local African-American man abducted into slavery in 1841 and transported to Louisiana, is now known internationally thanks to the acclaimed 2013 film based on Northup's autobiography, *Twelve Years a Slave*. But a grassroots effort to raise awareness of this compelling story has been going on for the past 15 years, in particular through Solomon Northup Day, an annual event launched in 1999 by Saratoga Springs resident and Skidmore College alumna Renee Moore.

This year's event will feature presentations, panel discussions, music, children's activities, film clips, and more. A large number of Northup descendants are expected to be in attendance, as well as descendants of Samuel Bass, the Canadian carpenter who assisted in Northup's rescue by contacting the captive's friends back home in upstate New York.

Among those giving opening remarks will be event founder Renee Moore and Saratoga Springs Mayor Joanne Yepsen. The keynote speaker will be Civil War historian and Yale professor David Blight, who is director of Yale's Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition. Other speakers will include actresses Devyn Tyler, who plays Northup's grown daughter in the film *12 Years a Slave*. Tyler will give a personal account of her experiences in making the movie.

A panel of four scholars who have researched Northup's life will respond to the keynote presentation. The panel includes David Fiske, Clifford Brown, and Rachel Seligman—co-authors of the book *Solomon Northup: The*

Complete Story of the Author of Twelve Years a Slave. Joining them will be Paul McCarty, town historian of Fort Edward, N.Y., and director of the town's Old Fort Museum.

There will also be a panel on slave history that will include Don Papson, founder and past president of the North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association; Paul Stewart, co-founder of the Underground Railroad History Project; Brooke Hathaway, manager of anti-trafficking programs at the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center; and Joshua Woodfork, former faculty member in Skidmore College's American Studies Department and now executive director of the President's Office at Skidmore.

Given that Solomon Northup was a gifted violinist, music will play a key role in the day's activities. Performers will include internationally acclaimed jazz saxophonist T.K. Blue; violinist Henrique Prince, who leads the New York City-based Ebony Hillbillies, one of the last black string bands in the country; and local musician Dan Hubbs.

A youth program will take place from 2 to 3:45 p.m. in adjoining rooms and will feature arts and crafts, poetry readings, storytelling, and singing.

Exhibitors and vendors will be on hand. Items for sale will include books, audiobooks, memorabilia, and DVDs of film clips.

Event founder Moore's vision statement for Solomon Northup Day states that the goal is to "bring to light *all* of the people involved in the struggle for freedom in the Americas and to encourage a better understanding of freedom and justice through the eyes of the African-American experience past and present; and to encourage youth participation in the struggle for freedom throughout the world."

On the evening prior to the event, Friday, June 18, the public is invited to a showing of the 1984 documentary *The Solomon Northup Odyssey*, directed by noted photographer, musician, and film director Gordon Parks. The screening will take place at 7 p.m. in Skidmore College's Filene Recital Hall.

For more information on Solomon Northup Day, visit www.skidmore.edu/solomon-northup-day/.

