

Bobbie Reno, Author, Artist, and Advocate for Black Sculptress, Presents at Emancipation Day

The 12th Annual Peterboro Emancipation Day will commence on Saturday, August 6 at 10:00 am with its traditional morning activities that replicate the Peterboro Emancipations Days of the 1920s and 1930s with assembly, song, history, and a photo followed by a processional to the cemetery for wreath laying at the gravestone of a person “Born a slave. Died Free,” and to the humble gravestone of wealthy abolitionist Gerrit Smith. The event starts at The Barn on the Gerrit Smith Estate National Historic Landmark, a site on the National Park Service Network to Freedom, the national Underground Railroad trail.

The Emancipation Day afternoon programs begin at 2 pm featuring a brief history of Edmonia Lewis, a 19th C. black sculptress, presented by Israel Zagate. Zagate is the current Colgate University Upstate Institute Fellow at the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum in Peterboro. He is majoring in Women Studies and Gender Studies, with an interest in Black Feminist Scholars. His interest in Black Feminist Scholars led him to uncover the career of a distinguished international sculptress –Edmonia Lewis.

Edmonia Lewis was born in 1844 to a Chippewa woman and a Haitian man. Lewis lived with her maternal aunts after the early deaths of her parents. In 1856 Edmonia attended New York Central College in McGraw, Cortland County NY. Chartered in 1848, Central College was the first college in the nation founded to accept persons of all colors and both sexes. Gerrit Smith was a benefactor of Central College. When the college faced bankruptcy in 1858, Smith purchased the college, and then gave it back to the trustees in 1860. Lewis attended Oberlin College in Ohio from 1859 to 1863, departing when wrongly accused of poisoning two classmates. She moved to Boston, and then lived in England and Rome developing her sculpturing. Gerrit Smith wrote in his journal, “August 23 1872, Edmonia Lewis (artist) of Rome, Italy, comes to take the first steps toward putting my statue in marble. I am surprised and not pleased by it. September 3, Edmonia leaves us.” Smith’s disinclination to a statue (a project conceived by his friends) prevailed. Edmonia made a plaster cast of the clasped right hands of Gerrit and Ann Smith, and later in her studio in Rome she carved the hands in marble. The sculpted hands will be brought to the Emancipation Day program by the Madison County Historical Society, Oneida NY.

Bobbie Reno will then present a special rendition of her children’s book *Edmonia Lewis: A Sculptor of Determination and Courage* which she authored and illustrated. Reno has resided near Albany NY her entire life, served as a county clerk and as clerk for a NYS senator. She became the East Greenbush NY historian in 2016 and began to research Edmonia Lewis which led the Reno’s advocacy for Lewis. In 2017, Bobbie led a successful fundraiser to restore the grave of Edmonia Lewis in London, England. Bobbie contacted Oberlin College in November 2020 to request Oberlin consider bestowing an Honorary Degree on Edmonia. On June 5, 2022, Oberlin College granted Edmonia her actual Diploma in the Ladies Course. Reno petitioned the United States Postal Service to issue a commemorative stamp for Edmonia Lewis as part of the Black Heritage series. The stamp was issued January 26, 2022.

Emancipation Day Co-chair Max Smith will update on the project *Songs of Slavery and Emancipation*, a film, book, and CD that debuted simultaneously in New York City and Peterboro June 18, 2022. The hour film will also be available for viewing at the conclusion of the afternoon programming.

Reno’s book on Lewis, the United States Postal Department First Day of Issue of the Lewis Stamp, and *Songs of Slavery and Emancipation* books and CDs will be on sale at the event at the Peterboro Mercantile, as well as other items on Peterboro heritage.

The public is encouraged to come for part or all of the event. Small group entries to The Laundry will be scheduled throughout the day to provide viewing of the stabilized building, and to collect ideas for further renovations and future interpretive exhibits of Peterboro.

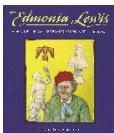
Donations are welcomed for admission. The Gerrit Smith Estate National Historic Landmark is located at 5304 Oxbow Road, Peterboro NY 13134. Its exterior exhibits are open dawn to dusk. The National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum is located down the street at 5255 Pleasant Valley Road, Peterboro NY 13134. For more information: www.gerritsmith.org, info@gerritsmith.org, 315-684-3262



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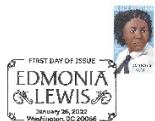
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United States Postal Department First Day of Issue of the Lewis Stamp will be for sale at the Peterboro Mercantile.



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Array of books about Edmonia Lewis.



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The *Songs of Slavery and Freedom* film screening project in Peterboro NY for Juneteenth Weekend 7 p.m. Saturday, June 18, 2022 will be updated.