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CHILDREN RECREATE JOURNEY TO FREEDOM IN ODESSA

ODESSA, Del. – Feb. 9, 2009 – A new educational journey awaits students at the Historic Houses of Odessa. Beginning in March, children will learn about the life of a fugitive slave traveling under the cover of darkness with limited supplies at a historic stop on the Underground Railroad.

Freedom Seekers: The Odessa Story program is part of the Historic Odessa Foundation's mission to encourage the use of its historic buildings by the general public, students and scholars. The program has been developed as part of the Living History Education program in order to educate visitors and to broaden the interpretive mission on the role Odessa played in the Underground Railroad. Last year, the Corbit-Sharp House, a National Historic Landmark, was accepted into the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom by the National Park Service, which evaluated the site as "making a significant contribution to the understanding of the Underground Railroad in American history."

Students participating in the **Freedom Seekers** program will begin their journey plunged in the darkness of the Muskrat Skinning Shed on the property of the Corbit-Sharp House – their only light coming from the guide's candle. Once the shed is illuminated, the "runaways" seated on bales of hay and barrels will learn about slavery, abolitionism, and the role that Delaware and Odessa played on the network to freedom.

"We are trying to create the appropriate mood," states Johnnye Baker, the Historic Odessa Foundation's education curator. "Darkness punctuated only by the dim lights of candles and lanterns... this was the world that fugitive slaves knew. They traveled at night, hiding during the day, slowly working their way North."

Before continuing on their journey, students will be told the story of Sam, a fugitive slave who managed to reach the Corbit-Sharp House, remaining hidden from the people walking the streets and grounds of the bustling port on the Appoquinimink River. On a morning in 1845, he approached Mrs. Corbit begging for refuge. At the risk of punishment for harboring a fugitive slave, Mrs. Corbit hid the runaway in an eave closet, a mere cubbyhole, on the third floor of the Corbit-Sharp House.

Next, Sam's perilous journey will become the students' own as they are equipped with haversacks, in which they will find the kinds of supplies that some slaves had while on the run. Just as some slaves would have been well-supplied and others not, the students will not all have the same amount or kind of supplies. The supplies include a canteen, a candle stub, flint and steel to make a fire, a couple of Appoquinimink Cakes for food, a compass and a spyglass. Guides will then assist students in the use of these items as well as discussing what life would have been like for slaves in hiding.

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After this orientation, students will recreate Sam's most risky act – the flight into the open. Using clues and a compass, the students will make their way to the back door of the Corbit-Sharp House. They will then weave through the house, using closet access and the backstairs to the cubbyhole at the bend in the third floor stairs. This is the place where Sam found refuge from a pursuing sheriff. Sam narrowly escaped capture because the sheriff, upon viewing the closet, deemed it impossible for a man to fit inside and did not search it.

Upon reaching the closet, the children will be peak into the cubby hole where they will be able to catch a glimpse of Sam in the dim light. The children will then gather around a lantern on the floor of the third floor and will be asked a few questions about the experience and what it would feel like to be in Sam's and Mrs. Corbit's positions.

The last part of the experience involves an activity and a take-home project for the students. Quilt squares will be passed out along with art supplies as the children will be asked to create a picture depicting something about the Underground Railroad experience.

“The artwork could include sketches of slave hiding places, safe houses, things used by slaves on the run,” explains Johnnye Baker. “The quilt squares can be taken back to the classroom and the classes can create a story quilt from the squares. We will encourage the children to send us photos of the class and their quilt so that we can frame and display them in the Bank in an area we have designated as our Freedom Gallery.”

This program was made possible by grants from the Chichester du Pont Foundation, the Gilliam Foundation and a grant from the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program, through the Underground Railroad Coalition of Delaware. Established in 2001, the Coalition advocates for Underground Railroad research, site preservation, education and tourism in Delaware.

For more information on **Freedom Seekers: The Odessa Story** and the Historic Odessa Foundation's Living History Education program, contact Johnnye Baker at 302-378-4119 or johnnye.baker@historicodessa.org, or visit www.historicodessa.org.

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The Historic Houses of Odessa is an enclave of 18th and 19th century structures located in the village of Odessa, Del. between the Appoquinimink River and U.S. Route 13. The historic buildings along with a well-documented collection of more than 4000 objects and furnishings are owned and operated by the nonprofit Historic Odessa Foundation, and offer a unique picture of Delaware's colonial period in a rural village that played a vital part in America's commercial history. For information on the Historic Houses of Odessa, public tours of the properties, and the foundation's Living History Education program, call 302-378-4119, or visit www.historicodessa.org.