

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (LZW) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

Contact: Elizabeth Horton de Meza  
ehorton@ethos-marketing.com  
207-856-2610 x240  
207-939-0023 cel

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
November 9, 2006

MAINE'S UNDERGROUND RAILROAD & ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT  
HONORED BY PORTLAND FREEDOM TRAIL  
*First of 16 Permanent Markers Unveiled, City Proclamation  
Issued*

Portland, Maine - The first of 16 granite and bronze markers honoring Portland's abolitionists was unveiled at a ceremony today by the city's Mayor James I. Cohen near the Eastern Cemetery on Congress Street, where many of Portland's leaders of Maine's Underground Railroad are buried.

Designated the Portland Freedom Trail by organizers, the permanent pedestal markers honor the dedication and sacrifice of those who called for an end to slavery and took action to protect runaway slaves heading north to Canada for freedom. At today's ceremony, flowers also were placed at the graves of members of the Manuel, Ropes, Ruby and Thomas families. A headstone was installed at the unmarked grave of Underground Railroad conductor Christopher Christian Manuel.

The Portland Freedom Trail builds upon the tour developed in conjunction with the visit of the *Freedom Schooner Amistad* to Portland in 2003. Maine has 75 possible Underground Railroad sites across the state, which organizers of the Portland Freedom Trail plan one day to link into a Maine Freedom Trail that will connect to the

national network of similar sites overseen by the National Park Service.

"Most people have no idea about the depth of African American history in Maine. The brief stories inscribed on each plaque will bring that history alive for students, residents and tourists," says Rachel Talbot Ross, director of equal opportunity and multicultural affairs, president of the Portland Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and a project director of Portland Freedom Trail.

P.O. Box 132 Portland, ME 04112 tel (207) 591-9980

[www.portlandfreedomtrail.org](http://www.portlandfreedomtrail.org)

The remaining markers will be installed in the spring throughout the Portland peninsula, following fundraising efforts, beginning with a gala on February 17 during Black History Month.

"Our goal is to raise \$125,000 to fund the production and installation of the 15 additional markers," comments Ross.

To date, financial and in-kind support has come from The NAACP, The United Way, The City of Portland and the Maine Humanities Council.

The completed trail is scheduled to be unveiled on June 19, the Juneteenth holiday commemorating the end of slavery.

The image on each of the plaques is that of a black family heading north to freedom by lantern light, as they point longingly toward the Big Dipper and the North Star.

African American artist, and a project director of Portland Freedom Trail, Daniel Minter created the artwork for the plaques, with the hope that Black American cultural, religious and social experiences in Maine will be celebrated by residents and visitors.

"The courage of these people is inspirational. Their amazing stories unite us all, no matter your racial or ethnic background. Their story is for anyone who continues today to support the struggle for freedom," says Minter.

In addition to designating the Portland Freedom Trail, organizers plan to conduct ongoing research, advance public discourse on social and economic justice, and produce

educational materials, including an audiotape for self-guided tours that can be downloaded from their web site at [www.portlandfreedomtrail.org](http://www.portlandfreedomtrail.org) or borrowed from the Portland Public Library. On the tape, listeners will learn about the historically significant sites where blacks lived, worked and provided refuge to runaway slaves.

"Portland Freedom Trail isn't just about what happened hundreds of years ago and those who are buried in this cemetery," continued Ross. "It's about struggles for human rights here in Maine, the U.S. and around the world—both past and present."

#### **About the Portland Freedom Trail**

The Portland Freedom Trail is a walking trail highlighting the people, places and activities associated with the Underground Railroad and the anti-slavery moment as actualized in Maine. Upon completion in June, sixteen permanent pedestal markers will honor the dedication and sacrifice of those who called for an end to slavery and took action to protect runaway slaves heading north to Canada for freedom. A diverse coalition of organizations and individuals have come together to create Portland Freedom Trail with the goal of sharing the untold stories of oppressed peoples pursuing freedom in Maine. Project Directors include Daniel Minter, Rachel Talbot Ross, Wells Staley-Mays, and Dawud Ummah. For more information, go to [www.freedomtrail.org](http://www.freedomtrail.org).

-END