

Historic Knott House  
*Ceremonial  
Reenactment*  
the Reading  
of the Emancipation Proclamation  
May 20, 1865



The historic Knott House, now a museum, in Tallahassee, Florida.

***Presented by***  
**Martin County Black Heritage Initiatives Inc. in partnership  
with Martin County Arts Council Inc. and supported by:  
Martin County Historic Preservation Board, Daughters of Union  
Soldiers Veterans Civil War Tent 12, Sons of Union Soldiers  
Veterans Civil War Camp 3, The Road to Victory Museum**

**Downtown Stuart Gazebo Park  
May 16, 2026**

# *Occasionally,*

only time and space allow full appreciation, or even recognition, of the depth and breadth of a historical event. Such is the case with the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863.

That one signature by President Abraham Lincoln set in motion a series of events that profoundly shaped American life and culture. The freedoms we take for granted today, first penned by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence 250 years ago, were ignited by the Emancipation Proclamation nearly 90 years later. The final document, issued January 1, 1863, breathed life into Jefferson's words, freeing thousands of enslaved Blacks and European indentured servants in Confederate states.

The freedom contagion at the end of the Civil War led within weeks to a Constitutional amendment freeing all enslaved peoples and, eventually, chipped away barriers over generations to true equality, regardless of race, religion or gender. The long path matters less than the fact that we are here now, rejoicing together as Americans in awe of one simple act of humanity.

# A Significant Day in Florida History *Reenacted*

For decades, Floridians celebrated May 20 at the historic Knott House in Tallahassee, where on that day in 1865 the Emancipation Proclamation was read aloud in the presence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Calvary and the 102<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Colored Troops. Newspapers of that era reported a “festive atmosphere and the flying of the American flag.” Black Floridians considered May 20 their true Emancipation Day, just as Texans recognized June 19 as theirs.



Today, we shall again share that significant event of May 20, 1865. The Martin County Arts Council Courthouse and Gazebo Park in Stuart are the sites of the reenactment, because they evoke a nostalgic sense of stature, solemnity, and the authority of law. The Gazebo reminds us of the wide steps and majestic columns of the Hagner/Knott family home that provided Brig. Gen. Edward M. McCook a platform as he read the weighty words that nudged this nation toward “a more perfect union,” enforced by military law in Florida for half a dozen more years.

# A New *Collaboration*

---

The Historic Knott House Ceremonial Reenactment is a collaboration among **Martin County Black Heritage Initiatives, Martin County Arts Council, Dr. Larry W. Howell Book Club, Barn Theatre, Sons Of Union Veterans Camp 3, and Daughters of Union Veterans Tent 12.**

Their members will portray key historical figures such as Gen. Edward McCook, President Abraham Lincoln, and Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. Also depicted is Major General Gordon Granger, who journeyed to Texas, the last Confederate outpost, to announce the war's end and to read the Emancipation Proclamation on June 19, now a national holiday called Juneteenth.



Ulysses S Grant

Edward McCook

Gordon Granger

Abraham Lincoln

**A historical reenactment requires of actors and audiences to suspend reality for a bit in order to time-travel to a period unimaginable.**

**Today, we ask you to do just that.**

# *One Day in Time:*

## **May 20, 1865**

**Imagine Florida's Confederate government, ensconced in the state's largest cities, having rejected President Lincoln's authority and refusing to accord credence to the Emancipation Proclamation. Florida's enslaved peoples remained in bondage, although the Civil War had ended 40 days earlier.**

General McCook, representing the United States government, arrived in Tallahassee to impose federal authority, dissolve the Confederate state government, and enforce freedom by military power; thus, the U.S. Army compelled Florida to comply with national law on May 20, 1865.



## *The Path to Universal Freedom*

### **Congress ratified amendments to the U.S. Constitution**

- 13th Amendment officially ended slavery for Blacks and all indentured servants of any race in 1865.
- 14th Amendment in 1868 provided birthright citizenship and equal protection under the law.
- 15th Amendment in 1870 stated that voting rights cannot be denied due to race, but excluded all women.
- 19th Amendment, ratified 50 years later in 1920, finally guaranteed voting rights for women.

### **Chipping Away Other Barriers to Total Emancipation**

- President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981 abolishing racial segregation in the military in 1948 after World War II ended.
- The 1954 landmark *Brown vs. Board of Education* mandated public school desegregation.
- The Civil Rights Act was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964, after King's "March on Washington," giving legal teeth to the 13th, 14th, 15th and 19th Constitutional Amendments.

# The Walls of Historic Buildings *Do* Talk

In fact, they often hold entire conversations connecting you to the past, creating new dimensions in time and place, and linking you to a community's cultural identity. Preservation efforts always seem to begin with one person's passion, which ultimately saved the Knott House & Museum in Tallahassee, built by a free Black man, renowned carpenter George Proctor with enslaved labor . Many Martin County buildings have thus been saved, including the Salerno Colored School in New Monrovia.

One person, Nancy Turrell, president of the Martin County Arts Council, is leading the current effort to save the old high school building with a vision of turning it into a home for the arts. The odds seem stacked against her. We're reminded, though, of Nelson Mandela's words, "It always seems impossible until it's done." It's the mantra of many who dedicate their time and energy to preserving the linkages to our history, notably Martin County Black Heritage Initiatives (BHI), known affectionately as the BeeHive.

BHI, a nonprofit, is transforming the historic Salerno Colored School House into a Living Program and Museum with support from the Martin County Board of Commissioners and the Martin County School District. The nonprofit is affiliated with the Country School Association of America, the Florida African-American Heritage Preservation Network, Indian River State School of Business, the University of Florida Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, and the Martin County Library's Digital Archives.

## *Program Participants*

### MASTER OF CEREMONIES ..... Retired Army Col. Charles “Chuck” Winn



Col. Winn spent 32 distinguished years serving our country in numerous locales—from Vietnam to Tuskegee University in Alabama to South Korea—in varied roles: from Commandant of Cadets, to defending the homeland against weapons of mass destruction by terrorists, to Senior War Planner with the US Forces Korea Headquarters in Seoul, among other challenging assignments. He lives now in Stuart.

---

### MARTIN ARTS COUNCIL “THE GALLERY” LECTURES

#### “AFRICAN-AMERICAN TROOPS OF THE CIVIL WAR”



Dr. Hubert Cleland Jackson Jr. served 24 years in the U.S. Army, including 20 years as a special Forces Operator (Green Beret). Airborne- and Ranger-Qualified, he deployed to dangerous locations around the world before earning his Ph.D. at age 72. He continues advocating for African American military history education. A native Floridian, he holds degrees from Bethune-Cookman University, Troy University, and Union Institute and University.

#### “CONTRIBUTIONS OF WOMEN TO THE CIVIL WAR”



Marcea Oetting is a member of the Daughters of American Revolution and several other historical groups. She is an honorary regent of the Adams-Onis Treaty Chapter in Florida. She acquired her Bachelor’s Degree in History at the University of Iowa and hopes to bring history to life for those who listen to her performances, because every woman has a story.

---

### REENACTORS

SONS OF UNION VETERANS, CIVIL WAR CAMP 3

DAUGHTERS OF UNION VETERANS CIVIL WAR TENT 12

## The Freedom *Season*

The Historic Florida Emancipation Day Celebration of May 20, 1865, the Historic Emancipation Day Celebration of June 19, 1865, and the 250th Anniversary Celebration of Independence Day on July 4, 1776, represent a “season” of collective and individual freedoms. We are compelled to reflect on the blessings bestowed on us and to remember with reverence all those who fought, suffered, and died for our freedoms.

---

## *Acknowledgments*

The Beehive extends its sincerest appreciation to our new and dearest friends for their dedication to telling our Emancipation Proclamation story.

- Nancy Turell, Martin County Arts Council and Co-Host of the Event
- Phillip Harvey - Event Organizer
- Brett Sandala - Consultant
- Carol Sutton - President, Daughters of Union Civil War Veterans - Tent 12
- Tiffany Thorne - Thorne's Mortuary
- Valerie Graham - Organizer
- Barbara Clowdus - Narrative Writer
- Brian Wysong - Event Organizer, Sons of Union Civil War Veterans - Camp 3
- Jackie Gore - Support Organizer
- Adam Fetterman - Attorney at Law
- The Firefly Group - fireflyforyou.com
- Sandy Vogelpohl - Member, Daughters of Union Civil War Veterans - Tent 11
- Umah Miller - Pastor, Port Salerno Church of God
- Joy Feldman - Joyful Printing
- Road to Victory Military Museum

---

## Black History Initiatives Inc. Board of Directors

Lloyd Jones, President/Founder  
 Jaconica Barnes - Director of Records  
 Ed Reuter - Director of Finance  
**Vikki** Tobiasz - Development Director  
 Holly Griffin - Director Schoolhouse Museum - Living History  
 Michael Syrkus - Director Of History & Research  
 Jacqui May - Advisory Chair