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Alexandria Community Media

New Freedom House exhibition invites you into Monday Robinson's life

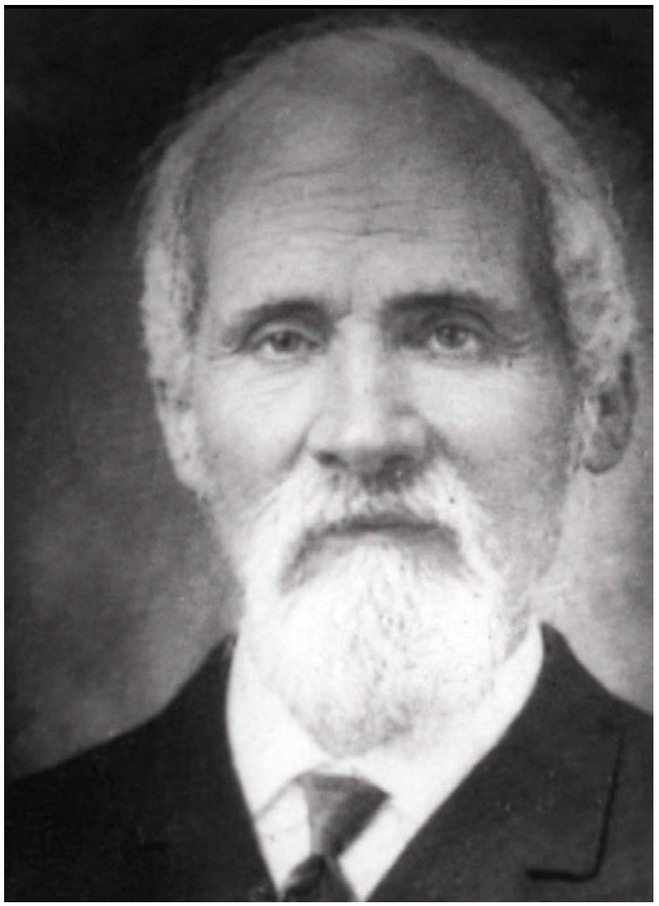
The Freedom House Museum at 1315 Duke St. invites you to view a new traveling exhibition, "Monday Robinson: A Life of Thorns and Roses."

The exhibition opened at Freedom House on Oct. 22 and will run through Dec. 31. Belle Grove Plantation, located in Middletown, Virginia, initially created and opened the exhibition in September.

The exhibition focuses on the life of Monday Robinson, born in 1778, which encompassed enslavement, freedom and later, his enslavement of his own family members as a means for their own protection. Robinson's complicated story traces through multiple African American enclaves in Virginia.

It includes the enslavement of his wife and children, presumably as a means for their own protection. But the exhibition shows evidence that Robinson hired out his children to landowners in his area and used his wife and three of his children as collateral to receive a loan.

Robinson did not manumit his family upon his death, and his brother was left with the task of freeing his wife and children in 1857. After securing their freedom, the family left Frederick County, and some stayed in Alexandria. Some descendants of the family are connected to the Contraband and Freedmen Cemetery Memorial, which caught the attention of genealogist Char McCargo Bah. The cemetery connections guided her to discover new branches of the Robinson family.



PHOTO/COURTESY OF ROBERT HENRY ASTON

Monday Robinson (1778-1856), courtesy of Robert Henry Aston, the great-grandson of Archibald Robinson and the great-great-grandson of Monday Robinson.

Descendant Fran Norton Burton and genealogists McCargo Bah and Brenda Burton Nelson researched Robinson and his family's lives for 16 years before the exhibition opened. Other major contributors include Kristen Laise, Belle Grove Plantation's executive director, and Jess Pritchard-Ritter, digital public historian and exhibit designer.

The exhibition's highlights include wills, census records, court orders, tax documents, deeds, apprenticeship papers, emancipation records and other sources that weave a complicated narrative of Robinson's life.

Guests can discover Robinson's complex life through primary source documents found in Alexandria and Virginia counties such as Lancaster, Northumberland, Middlesex, Prince William and Loudoun counties. In his later life, Robinson lived in Middletown and Frederick County and participated in community life, including conducting business with Belle Grove Plantation.

We invite the public to learn more about the complicated history of Monday Robinson.

Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.