

Remembering, Reassessing John Brown, 150 Years Later

By [John Toler](#)

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John Brown's Raid on Harpers Ferry 150 years ago to be re-enacted this weekend, commencing the Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War.

Events marking the sesquicentennial of John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry officially began with the kick-off in April and the Driving Tour that followed, but many people involved with Loudoun County's part in the raid and American Civil War Sesquicentennial will begin to feel the spirit with a re-enactment of the raid, which will take place Friday through Sunday, Oct. 16-18 at Harpers Ferry. The actions of John Brown, the fiery abolitionist who attacked the U.S. armory at Harpers Ferry in October 1859 in order to get arms for a slave revolt, will be re-enacted, discussed and analyzed over the three-day observance.

"The John Brown Raid is looked upon by most historians as the spark that began the Civil War," said Dennis Frye, chief historian at Harpers Ferry National History Park.



Activities marking the raid have been organized by the John Brown Sesquicentennial Quad-State Committee chaired by Frye, which includes representatives from Franklin County, Pa., Washington County, Md., Frederick County, Md., Jefferson County, W.Va., Frederick County, Va., and Loudoun County.

The event is free and open to the public, but the U.S. Park Service advises that due to the number of people expected, visitors must park at the Cavalier Heights Visitor Center and ride shuttle buses to the historic area. Parking is on a first-come basis, and when the lots are full, parking will be closed until spaces open up.

Three Days of History, Drama

Friday activities start at 2 p.m. with a book signing in the authors' tent at Harpers Ferry, followed by "John Brown as Art," from 4-8 p.m. in the Family and Youth Tent, and a performance of "John Brown's Body" by the Jefferson High School Drama Department from 7:30 pm. To 9 p.m.

"Proceed from the Ferry", a re-enactment of the six-mile trek made by Brown and his men from the Kennedy Farm across the Potomac River in Maryland to Harpers Ferry, begins at 8 p.m., and at 9 p.m., "The Eve of the Raid," a lantern-lit walk through Harpers Ferry will be conducted, setting the stage for the raid.

The evening ends with re-enactors arriving in Harpers Ferry at 10 p.m., featuring the 150th Anniversary Procession and closing ceremony in Arsenal Square.

Highlights on Saturday include Living History Programs from 10 a.m.-8:30 p.m. in Arsenal Square; "In the Footsteps of John Brown," special 150th Anniversary hikes conducted by park rangers from 10 a.m. until noon, and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.; and "Reacting to John Brown's Raid," a living history event about how citizens, militiamen, U.S. troops and voters reacted to the raid, presented from 1 p.m.-2 p.m. and 3:30 p.m.-4 p.m.

In addition, a concert will be performed by the U.S. Marine Corps Band from 4:30 p.m.-5:15 p.m. The final activity will be "John Brown: 'A Caged Tiger,'" a lantern-lit tour presenting the events in the engine house the night before Brown was captured.

The event concludes Sunday from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. with "The Walk of Descendants," a commemorative walk through the Harpers Ferry, with descendants of the townspeople, militia, Marines, the raiders and John Brown's family invited to participate. "The Final Assault," marking the U.S. Marine assault on the Armory and Fire Engine House, will be presented by the U.S.M.C. Historical Society, at Arsenal Square from 10 a.m.-11 a.m.

On Sunday from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m., former Maryland Lt. Gov. Kathleen Kennedy Townsend and others will read passages from Stephen Vincent Benet's "John Brown's Body," with music provided by the Maryland Symphony Orchestra String Ensemble. A wreath-laying ceremony at the Engine House for Pvt. Luke Quinn will be conducted by retired Lt. Gen G.R. Christmas, U.S.M.C. from 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. The weekend concludes with "Music of Sword of the Spirit," songs of John Brown performed on the Shenandoah Stage. For a complete list of activities, visit www.nps.gov/hafe/index.htm.

The observance of the raid runs concurrently with an Academic Symposium at the Mather Training Center in Harpers Ferry on Oct. 14-17 co-sponsored by Pennsylvania State University, Mont Alto and the Harpers Ferry Historical Association.

John Brown's Raid Remembered Here

Other local events about John Brown's Raid are being coordinated by the Loudoun County Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Committee, established in December 2008 by the board of supervisors to organize and promote the Civil War observances, which will take place through 2015. The Journey Through Hallowed Ground Partnership, based in Waterford, and the Loudoun Conference and Visitors Association are also active participants in the sesquicentennial commemoration.

On Oct, 14, there will be a presentation about John Brown's Raid on the U.S. Arsenal in "live entertainment form" at the Goose Creek Friends Meeting, 18204 Lincoln Road, Lincoln, Va.

On Oct. 17 from 9 a.m. until noon, there will be an author's book signing and related exhibits at the Thomas Balch Library in Leesburg, sponsored by the Loudoun County Civil War Roundtable. Sons of Confederate Veterans, Sons of Union Veterans, and United Daughters of the Confederacy will present their Color Guards to recognize the 150th Anniversary of the Civil War. Also on display, courtesy of the Archives of the Clerk of the Circuit Court for Loudoun County, will be reproductions of Loudoun County Civil War era records.

On the evening of Oct. 17 from 7 p.m. until 8:30 p.m., there will be a special program and a battlefield illumination at Ball's Bluff Regional Park north of Leesburg, "A quiet memorial to honor those who fell in the Battle of Ball's Bluff" on Oct. 21, 1861.

On Oct. 24, the Mosby Heritage Area association of Middleburg will present "Slavery and Flight in the Mosby Heritage Area," as part of their "Saturday Morning Special" series. The event begins at 9 a.m. at the Mount Zion Cemetery on Old Waterford Road, Leesburg (not the Mount Zion on U.S. 50 at Gilbert's Corner). From there, participants will caravan to Waterford, where they will learn about the network used to help fugitive slaves fleeing to the North, and visit an Underground Railroad site. Cost is \$15 for adults and \$5 for students.

The MHAA is also presenting "John Mosby, John Brown," on Oct. 24 from 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., at the Rector house in Atoka, as part of their "Cavaliers, Courage and Coffee" interpretive program. Actors portraying individuals involved will provide a retrospective of the events leading up to John Brown's Raid and the Civil War that followed. Cost is \$5 for adults and \$2 for students.



Re-enactors prepare for "John Mosby, John Brown" program.

On Nov. 7, MHAA will offer "BROWN! John Brown's 1859 Harpers Ferry Raid and the Ensuing Northern Virginia Panic," an immersive field experience examining slavery in the region, the nature of Harpers Ferry before the Raid, the nature of John Brown's raiders, their experience at the Kennedy Farm and in the raid itself, and the panic-stricken aftermath in Northern Virginia during and after Brown's trial.

Participants will spend time on a plantation, sit on the attic floor of the Kennedy Farm, and actually march into Harpers Ferry from Maryland by nightfall. Continental breakfast, supper, bus, and all admissions included in \$75.00 fee. The bus will leave the Visitors Center at Morven park at 8:45 a.m., and return at about 9 p.m. Pre-registration required. Visit www.mosbyheritagearea.org or call 540-687-6681.