

NEWS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONTACT: Jake Webb
(603) 570-8469
jake@blackheritagetrailnh.org

Ona Judge Mural Unveiling Connects Portsmouth to Philadelphia and Mount Vernon in National Reckoning with America's Founding History

PORTSMOUTH — This May, the story of Ona Judge Staines — the courageous woman who liberated herself from enslavement in the household of George and Martha Washington — will take center stage in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, as historians, descendants, artists, and public history leaders gather for a landmark moment of remembrance, truth-telling, and national reflection.

On **Saturday, May 23, 2026, at 2:00 PM**, the **Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire (BHTNH)** will unveil a mural honoring Ona Judge Staines at **222 Court Street in Portsmouth**.

More than a public art installation, the unveiling represents a growing national movement to challenge the contradictions embedded in the nation's early formation and to elevate the stories of Black Americans whose lives and acts of resistance shaped the fabric of the country.

Representatives from the **Avenging the Ancestors Coalition (ATAC)** in Philadelphia and from **Mount Vernon**, George Washington's plantation in Virginia, will join the ceremony, underscoring the powerful historical connections between Virginia, Philadelphia, and New Hampshire in Judge's journey toward freedom.

The mural, created by acclaimed artist **Manuel Ramirez of Positive Street Art in Nashua, NH**, honors Ona Judge as a national symbol of courage, resistance, and determination.

Featured guest speaker **Dr. Erica Armstrong Dunbar**, the nationally recognized historian and bestselling author of *Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge*, will deliver an address and sign books at Strawberry Bank following the unveiling. Dunbar's groundbreaking scholarship helped bring national attention to Ona Judge's story and transformed public understanding of enslavement during the early American republic.

"Ona Judge's story belongs to the nation," said **JerriAnne Boggis**, executive director of the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire. "Her journey connects some of the most iconic places in early American history — Mount Vernon, Philadelphia, and Portsmouth — while forcing us to confront difficult truths about freedom, power, and whose stories have too often been excluded from our national narrative."

Born into enslavement at Mount Vernon, Ona Judge was brought by the Washingtons to Philadelphia while George Washington served as president. After learning she was to be gifted to Martha Washington's granddaughter, Judge made the courageous decision to self-emancipate, leaving the presidential household and traveling north to Portsmouth, where she established a life in freedom despite the Washingtons' persistent efforts to recapture her.

The mural unveiling arrives at a critical cultural moment, as communities across the country reconsider how public history is told and whose voices are represented in the American story — particularly as the nation approaches the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

The event is free and open to the public. Media interviews will be available with Dr. Erica Armstrong Dunbar, Manuel Ramirez, representatives from Mount Vernon and ATAC, and leadership from BHTNH.

For more information, visit the [Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire](#).

About the Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire

The Black Heritage Trail of New Hampshire connects people to more than 300 years of African American history in New Hampshire. Through guided tours, curriculum development, and public programs, BHTNH fosters a deeper understanding of the Black experience in Northern New England.



Step into history. Leave your footprint.



Ona Judge Staines
MURAL UNVEILING

2:00 PM
Saturday, May 23, 2026
222 Court St., Portsmouth, NH

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