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Exhibit Preserves Pursuit Of Liberty
Museum Unveils Artifacts From African Americans

By Raymond McCaffrey

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An exhibit of hundreds of rare artifacts unearthed in Annapolis over the past 27 years shows that the quest for freedom by African Americans is as much a part of the city's history as the fight for liberty by the wealthy property owners who rebelled against the British.

A central theme of the exhibit, which opens Tuesday, is "the quest of African Americans to create and preserve their integrity and to establish their freedom in a slave society," said Mark Leone, a University of Maryland anthropology professor who directs the Archaeology in Annapolis project, a partnership that, through the years, has involved the university, the city's Banneker-Douglass Museum, the City of Annapolis and the Historic Annapolis Foundation.

The items, which the project has discovered in about 40 digs since 1981 with more than 350 students, professors and others at the university, will be on public display together for the first time in "Seeking Liberty: Annapolis, an Imagined Community" at the museum. The exhibit will be the largest archaeological display ever at the museum, the state's official repository for African American material culture.

About a third of the artifacts in the collection are linked to African Americans.
"What I can tell from the artifacts is the coherence of African American culture, the survival of African practices, ways that African Americans defeated being marginalized," Leone said.

The exhibit, which will run until late November, is designed to mark the 300th anniversary of Annapolis's Royal Charter, which allowed it to hold elections and establish self-governance.

"The main theme of the exhibit is the quests of different groups in Annapolis for greater freedom and liberty," Leone said. "The effort that unifies Annapolis is the effort to make one's own people free."

Annapolis was a well-known port for slavery in Maryland, which freed slaves in 1864.

The centerpiece of the exhibit is a section of the printers' type that Jonas Green used to produce a "death's head" stamp, a skull-and-crossbones icon like one used in a 1765 newspaper editorial protesting British taxation. The piece, excavated from the site of Green's print shop, highlights the city's role as a major center of pre-Revolutionary War rebellion.

But Leone said that what sets the exhibit apart from more traditional treatments of Annapolis's history is the emphasis on African American artifacts, some taken from houses where the city's historic figures lived.

"This is the only one that represents the whole city," he said. "The only one that represents black and white Annapolis."

The exhibit focuses on excavations at five landmarks: the Governor Calvert House, the print shop, the Maynard-Burgess House, Reynolds Tavern and the Brice House.

On display will be a model of the basement of one of the houses where African spiritual relics were found, said Amelia Harris, the museum's exhibitions specialist. The model shows that the relics were buried in a pattern resembling the ovular shape of a cosmogram, a symbol of African spirit practices. [Read the full article at Washington Post online >>>].