

OSV will feature special Martin Luther King programs

STURBRIDGE — Old Sturbridge Village is offering free admission for children in January if they are accompanied by an adult.

The museum is offering special programs for the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday, featuring storyteller and museum educator Tammy Denease, who will present Honoring a Slave Heroine: The Mumbet Story. The presentation is based on the true story of Elizabeth “Mumbet” Freeman, a young slave woman who won her freedom in court in 1781. All MLK Day programs at the Village are included in museum admission.

To win her freedom, Mumbet cited language in the Massachusetts constitution: “all men are born free and equal,” and her case was a precursor to the 1783 decision that ended slavery in Massachusetts. She once said, “Anytime while I was a slave, if one minute’s freedom had been offered to me, and I was told I would die at the end of that minute, I would have taken it, just to stand on God’s green earth a free woman.”

After spending 30 years as a slave in the household of Col. John Ashley of Sheffield, Mumbet hired a lawyer, Theodore Sedgwick, and successfully sued for her freedom in court. Once free, she took the name Elizabeth Freeman, and was employed by the Sedgwick family as a nurse, healer and midwife.

Storyteller Denease grew up in Mississippi listening to stories told by her great-grandmother, a former slave who lived to the age of 125. “It’s amazing to me that living now, nearly 150 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, that I personally knew – and loved dearly – someone who survived slavery,” Denease says. “I draw on my great-grandmother’s own life story for inspiration when portraying Mumbet.”

Other activities at Old Sturbridge Village on MLK Day and throughout the month

include ice skating (bring your own skates), sledding on 1830s-style sleds, and sleigh rides (snow permitting). After enjoying the museum’s outdoor winter activities, visitors can warm up indoors beside one of the Village’s many fireplaces and take part in hands-on crafts and activities. Children can also spend time “pretending” in Old Sturbridge Village’s popular “KidStory” indoor play area.

With more than 40 restored buildings – farmhouses, mills, meetinghouses and craft shops – on more than 200 acres of fields and woods, Old Sturbridge Village is one of the country’s oldest and largest living history museums and celebrates early New England life from 1790 to 1840.

Located just off the Massachusetts Turnpike and Routes I-84 and 20 in Sturbridge, the Village is open year-round. Winter hours are Wednesday through Sunday, 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. (The Village is open on all Monday holidays. For more information, visit osv.org or call 800-SEE-1830.

