



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 23, 2021

Vergennes Historic Marker to be Unveiled and Dedicated in Honor of Sheriff Stephen Bates, Vermont's First Known Black Sheriff and Chief of Police

Vermont's first known elected Black Sheriff and Chief of Police, Sheriff Stephen Bates, will be honored with the unveiling and dedication of an historic marker in Vergennes City Park (or Vergennes Opera House if inclement weather), at **11:00am on October 3rd, 2021**. Stephen Bates was first elected to Sheriff and Chief of Police in Vergennes in 1879. Formerly enslaved in Virginia, Bates gained his freedom and served Union soldiers during the Civil War, coming to Vergennes with Frederick E. Woodbridge, a Vermont congressman, in 1866. Bates raised a family in Vergennes, and some of his descendants living in Massachusetts will be attending the dedication and unveiling. A representative from Senator Sanders' office will be present to give the descendants a framed copy of the Congressional Record recognizing Sheriff Bates. The public is invited to attend the unveiling.

Stephen Bates served as Sheriff of Vergennes for 25 years until his death in 1907. He was locally famous during his time, and yet many today are unaware of his life and accomplishments. A community historic marker team, consisting of historians and other community members, has spent the past year researching his life and rediscovering his story in Vergennes. The team consulted a variety of sources, including early newspaper records, the Bixby library, Vergennes City records, an oral history recorded via teachers at Vergennes Union High School, and records from the Shirley Plantation in Virginia. The October 3rd event is the culmination of their efforts to recover Stephen Bates' remarkable life story.

The effort to honor Stephen Bates began in the fall of 2020, after Liz Ryan and Alicia Grangent, leaders of "Voices in the Park," a racial justice initiative in Vergennes, learned about him through Bo Price, a Ferrisburgh resident. Price had begun researching Bates' life after meeting his great-grandson, Larry Schuyler, who had visited St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Vergennes. Larry's great-grandfather, Stephen Bates, and grandmother, Rose Bates, had been members of the church in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Discussions between Ryan, Grangent, Price and Schuyler ultimately led to the formation of the historic marker team with the goal of placing an historic marker in Vergennes to honor Bates' career and life. The historic marker team states, "We are grateful that Sheriff Bates' service and career is finally being recognized and publicized through this marker. We hope that his remarkable story will resonate with members in the community and encourage further discussion, inquiry, and celebration."

A short biography of Sheriff Bates is available: [Vermont Black History Database](#).
Recent [Burlington Free Press](#) article.

Location: Vergennes City Park (or Vergennes Opera House if inclement weather)

Other considerations: Please bring a chair for sitting outside at the event. Restaurants across from the park will be open for lunch. Please consult current COVID guidelines for outdoor and indoor events.