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The MoHiP cast taking a bow after the performance (l-r) Matt Galbreath, Clyde Ruffin, Courtneyjo Washington, Cheryl Black, and Phil Groeschel.

Society Takes Performance to Boonville

The State Historical Society of Missouri's MoHiP Theater presented *The Escape, or A Leap for Freedom* on February 2 for an audience of roughly two hundred at Boonville's beautifully restored Thespian Hall. The presentation focused on the life and writings of William Wells Brown, a slave, abolitionist, lecturer, novelist, lyricist, and the first African American to publish a play, *The Escape*, in 1858. The Society joined the Friends of Historic Boonville and the University of Missouri Department of Theatre to showcase this production.

MoHiP Theater (Missouri History in Performance) is coordinated through the Society's Program Committee by Mary Barile, a specialist in dramatic composition, with the mission of bringing to life the stories that make up Missouri's rich history. MoHiP uses a reader's theater format to present original scripts from primary resources or historical plays. Cheryl Black, associate professor of theatre at MU, adapted the script from Brown's writings, performed in, and directed the production. Clyde Ruffin, Department of Theatre chair, held the role of William Wells Brown with honor and also voiced the humorous slave Cato. Additional cast members were Matt Galbreath, Phil Groeschel, and Courtneyjo Washington.

Acclaimed Boonville folksingers Cathy Barton and Dave Para opened the evening with music of the period, singing abolitionist and freedom songs—one attributed to Brown—to establish the emotional tone for the dramatic reading that followed.

Tim Jackman of Fayette was in the audience with members from his church, St. Paul United Methodist, and noted, "It's great any time you have a community event that brings people together to better understand our history. Several church members looked toward this program as an opportunity to observe rather than lead participation, and we met to share a fellowship dinner before the program. Whenever it's possible to present something like this so that our youth can learn, it's a special opportunity."

Frank and Julie Thacher of Boonville offered, "It was just marvelous." Frank continued, "The Friends of Historic Boonville were thrilled with the event and we are hoping to do more with MoHiP Theater, especially in our unique Thespian Hall."

Society trustee and Boonville resident Dale Reesman said, "It was a wonderful performance, especially to be done in a theater built about the same time as Brown was writing the script. The reader's theater method was very effective, well accepted by the audience."

Plans are underway for more MoHiP programs, including one drawn from nineteenth-century newspapers, another from letters written during World War II, and a third using primary source material on the life of ragtime musician John William "Blind" Boone.

For more information, contact Christine Montgomery, MontgomeryC@umsystem.edu, (573) 882-2476.

Genealogy Classes aid new researchers

The State Historical Society of Missouri and Genealogical Society of Central Missouri (GSCM) jointly sponsored classes (January 15-February 19, 2008) for nearly twenty beginning genealogists. Over the six-week course, sessions increased in complexity to ease newcomers slowly into the world of research. The first class focused on gathering information, recording data, and citing sources, then moved to more detailed and in-depth methods of researching family roots.

The second class used newspapers to highlight information that can provide clues leading to successful research pursuits. Student genealogists were asked to brave the cold and inclement weather to attend the third week of classes, where they learned about the family history information that can be found in federal census records, and during the fourth week, instead of class, there was assisted research.

The final two sessions saw former GSCM President Anne Miller share her expertise in the use of probate records, and Society reference specialist Amy Waters offered advice on the many ways computers can ease research, whether through the Internet or by helping to create record forms to avoid scattered notes.

Genealogical societies, libraries, or other organizations that would like to host these classes should contact the Society's newspaper library at (573) 882-1180 for more information about the availability of traveling workshops.