

For Immediate Release
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Local Scholar/Performer Returns from Paris Mission

“So what happened in France?” This is a line from Amanda Kemp’s heart opening play *Show me the Franklins! Remembering the Ancestors, Benjamin Franklin and Slavery*. It transitions the play from the present tense to the 18th century and from the U.S. to France. The play’s main character, The Scholar, also for the first time leaves the safety of her lecture notes and scholarly voice to become Abby an enslaved woman who ran away from her American masters in France.

“So what happened in France?” Like the Scholar in the play, Kemp left the comfort of what she knew for the completely unknown, trusting the pull that I felt deep within drawing her to Paris.

With little French and few contacts, on March 28, 2008 Kemp flew to Paris.

“I went to Paris to witness to the life of Abby Jay, an enslaved woman who ran away from her American owners. Benjamin Franklin had her put in jail where, because she refused to return to her mistress, she got fatally ill. Abby Jay died in France disremembered while Franklin often touted as a “champion of abolition” left France a hero and died at eighty-four. I wanted Abby Jay to be remembered—that is reconnected and reattached to the international history of Benjamin Franklin.”

On March 30, the musee des Artes et Metiers was closing its multimillion dollar exhibit of Franklin without any mention of slavery or Abby Jay. Kemp had sought to bring her play to tell this story but could not find a sponsor and so decided to answer the call and go alone.

But she found some welcome support. French historian Jeanne-Henriette Louis, accompanied Kemp to her performances and translates as needed. Dr. Louis a historian of colonial America, had published on Franklin in France and was taken by Dr. Kemp’s work.

Dr. Kemp performed at Espace Canopy, an art gallery owned by two young women; at a private soiree hosted by Patricia La Plante-Collins, an African American expatriate; and on the streets of Paris. She also shared Abby Jay’s story many times in conversations with people at the Musee des Artes et Metiers, at a luncheon with members and attenders of Paris monthly meeting and on the streets of Passy, the district of Paris where Franklin lived..

She was shadowed for two days by French journalist and documentary film maker Francois Bringer. An emmy award winning broadcast journalist, Francois was fluent in English and had even spent some time in the South Bronx where Kemp grew up. Francois filmed Kemp in the historic Passy district where both Franklin and Abby had

lived. He also documented her visit to the Musee on the last day of the Franklin exhibit, capturing Kemp's conversations with museum goers, security guards, and docents about Benjamin Franklin and slavery and Abby Jay.

Producer Dawn Dreyer has since formed a partnership with Kemp to create an hour-long documentary about Kemp's call, the play and the ancestor workshops that have evolved from her experiences.