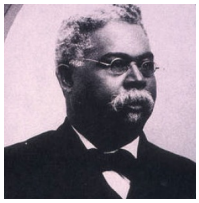

Columbia, S.C. --- The world premiere of the new documentary "The Courage of Robert Smalls" will examine the extraordinary life and exploits of the former slave-turned Civil War hero and Reconstruction-era congressman Saturday, Dec. 2 at 3 p.m. at the South Carolina State Museum.

In addition, Smalls – as channeled by re-enactor Donald Sweeper – will greet the public and share stories of the life of this remarkable man.

The film will tell the amazing story of Smalls, a 23-year-old slave from Beaufort, who made history on May 13, 1862 when he stole the Confederate ship Planter from under the noses of Charleston Harbor guards, slipped past Fort Sumter and steamed his way to freedom, turning the ship over to Federal forces. This feat won him an audience with President Abraham Lincoln.

Smalls entered politics at the dawn of the Reconstruction era. He became a leader in Beaufort County, was elected to the South Carolina legislature and in 1874 he was elected to the U.S. Congress, where he served five terms.

A panel discussion, reception and gallery tour of the museum's current exhibit The Life and Times of Congressman Robert Smalls will follow the film's showing. Panelists include Matt Barrows, the film's producer; Dr. Valinda Littlefield, professor of African American History at the University of South Carolina and Dr. Fritz Hamer, curator of published materials at the South

Caroliniana Library.

Prior to the film and discussion, at 2 p.m. in the fourth floor gallery displaying the exhibit, Sweeper, in costume and the persona of Smalls, will portray the congressman and chat with museum guests about the exhibit and Smalls, giving them a "first-person" glimpse into Smalls's life.

"The movie complements the traveling exhibit, adding important information about the challenges Smalls faced during Reconstruction," said State Museum Traveling Exhibits Manager Jeff Powley.

The movie and Sweeper's appearance are free with regular museum admission or membership.

"The Courage of Robert Smalls" is sponsored by the S.C. Hall of Fame and produced by SCETV. Sweeper's appearance is sponsored by the S.C. Humanities Council.

For more info, contact Jeff Powley at (803) 898-4921 or visit southcarolinastatemuseum.org.