

New Hampshire Governor Hassan to Sign Bill Posthumously Freeing Enslaved Portsmouth Africans on Friday, June 7

----- Commemoration “Stands in Honor of Those Forgotten” with African Burying Ground Memorial Park

Portsmouth, New Hampshire (June 4, 2013) – The African Burying Ground Memorial Park in downtown Portsmouth has received a significant boost in recognition thanks to the passage of a New Hampshire State Legislature Bill designed to answer a 1779 petition for freedom from 20 Africans enslaved in Portsmouth NH households. Selections from the petition are being incorporated in the African Burying Ground Memorial being planned for a site on Chestnut Street in downtown Portsmouth where remains of 18th century Africans were rediscovered in 2003.

The bill SB187 (text follows) made national news earlier this spring when it passed unanimously in the NH State Senate and the NH House. **The bill will be signed into law by Governor Maggie Hassan on Friday, June 7th. The bill-signing ceremony takes place in the Discover Portsmouth Center, 10 Middle Street in Portsmouth at 11:30 am.** The event is free and open to the public. A reception follows at the Seacoast African American Cultural Center in the same building.

State Senator Martha Fuller Clark (D--Dist 21) the main sponsor of legislation aimed at responding to the original 1779 petition that was tabled by the NH State Legislature will participate in the signing ceremony and will be joined by Vernis Jackson, African Burying Ground Committee chair; Valerie Cunningham, author of Black Portsmouth; Tom Watson, president Portsmouth Athenaeum and the additional sponsors of the legislation: Sen. David Watters, Dist 4; Sen. David Boutin, Dist 16; Sen. Sylvia Larsen, Dist 15; Rep. Jacqueline Cali-Pitts, Rockingham 30; Rep. Robert Cushing, Rockingham 21; Rep. Laura Pantelakos, Rockingham 25; Rep. Gerald Ward, Rockingham 28; Rep. Brian Wazlaw, Rockingham 29

[About the African Burying Ground Memorial Park \(www.africanburyinggroundnh.org\)](http://www.africanburyinggroundnh.org)

The African Burying Ground Memorial Park stands in honor of those forgotten on the site of an 18th century cemetery that had been paved over, built over and overlooked as Portsmouth grew in later years. In October 2003, the human remains were rediscovered during a street improvement excavation. Subsequent DNA testing under the direction of the State Archaeologist identified eight individuals of African descent. This careful treatment and the painstaking laboratory analysis make this the only archaeologically verified African Burying Ground of its era in all of New England, and give it national significance. Only one other site in the US –the National Park in lower Manhattan – is of comparable age, size and historical importance.

Since 2004, the African Burying Ground Committee, working with public forums, the Chestnut Street abutters, the Mayor and City Council, have worked to implement a plan to create the African Burying Ground Memorial Park. Designed by sculptor and artist Jerome Meadows and local landscape architect Roberta Woodburn, the memorial is intended to connect the people of Portsmouth today with Portsmouth’s past through sculptural figures, plantings, information about Portsmouth’s black history and a burial vault for the reinterred remains.

The African Burying Ground Committee is supported by the Seacoast African American Cultural Center, Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail, Art-Speak, the Portsmouth Historical Society and growing numbers of local businesses and individuals who have made donations and pledges totaling more than \$750,000 of the \$1.2 million goal. Honorary chairs of the fund-raising campaign are Dr. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

To learn more about the African Burying Ground, to make a donation or to get involved in the creation of the African Burying Ground Memorial Park – We Stand in Honor of Those Forgotten, visit www.africanburyinggroundnh.org

SB 187 – AS AMENDED BY THE HOUSE

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

In the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand Thirteen

AN ACT posthumously emancipating enslaved Africans in New Hampshire.

Be it Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court convened:

1 1 Purpose.

2 I. In the midst of the Revolutionary War, 20 enslaved Africans from Portsmouth presented a
3 petition to the general court asking it to abolish slavery so “that the name of slave may not more be
4 heard in a land gloriously contending for the sweets of freedom.” The general court denied the
5 petition, stating “...[A]t this time, the House is not ripe for a Determination in this matter:
6 Therefore ordered that the further consideration and determination of the matter be postponed till a
7 more convenient opportunity.” Fourteen of the men died as slaves.

8 II. The 20 men quoted the ideals of the Revolution in their petition, rightly stating that
9 “Freedom is an inherent right of the human species, not to be surrendered but by consent, for the
10 sake of social life [and] that private or public tyranny and slavery are alike detestable to minds
11 conscious of the equal dignity of human nature.”

12 III. According to historian Valerie Cunningham, by 1800, “six petitioners became free and
13 independent family heads: Peter Warner, Pharaoh Shores, Jack Odiorne, Prince Whipple, Cesar
14 Gerrish, and Romeo Rindge.”

15 IV. This act would answer that petition by posthumously declaring those who died in slavery
16 free men 234 years after their first request.

17 2 Emancipation. The following men are hereby declared emancipated freed men in gratitude for
18 their service to the colonial foundations of New Hampshire:

19 Samuel Wentworth	Winsor Moffatt
20 Cato Warner	Garrett Colton
21 Kittindge Tuckerman	Peter Frost
22 Seneca Hall	Nero Brewster
23 Pharoah Rogers	Quam Sherburne
24 Cato Newmarch	Will Clarkson
25 Zebulon Gardner	Cipio Hubbard

26 3 Effective Date. This act shall take effect upon its passage.