

Harvard prof. to honor local historians

■ *Burying Ground talk set for April 25*

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PORTSMOUTH — Harvard University history professor Dr. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has been invited by the African Burying Ground Committee to explore the importance of African-American historians at an event in Portsmouth on April 25.

Ulrich, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, is honorary co-chair of the African Burying Ground Memorial Park campaign, along with fellow Harvard professor Dr. Henry Louis Gates.

Ulrich's approach to history has been described as a tribute to "the silent work of ordinary people" — an approach that, in her words, aims to "show the interconnection between public events and private experience."

She is the author of five books, including "Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History," "The Age of Home-spun," which highlighted many early American artifacts from Seacoast museums, and "A Midwife's Tale," for which Ulrich won the Pulitzer Prize.

Ulrich said she will discuss the importance of local historians who may not have all the trappings of an academic but "have made significant breakthroughs in studying different themes in African-American history."

She intends to give a nod of appreciation to Valerie Cunningham, who she came to know when both were at the University of New Hampshire. Cunningham wrote the book "Black Portsmouth," which delved into the African history of the city. She said local historians like Cunningham are the ones who "keep local newspapers, take care of reminis-

cences of people, keep street directories. So when a scholar comes along looking for information, this often makes the difference. A local project can build into a national project because of their work."

In her book "Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History," she speaks of her efforts to track down a slave known only as Harriet. Through local histories, family histories and local records, she was able to give the slave a name and "understand what happened to her."

Ulrich's guest appearance in Portsmouth also offers the African Burying Ground Committee the first public opportunity to thank her for lending her support as an honorary co-chair.

The park will be located on Chestnut Street, the site where the remains of 13 people were discovered in 2003. The bodies were determined to be of African descent, and believed to be among 200 or more Africans buried in that area of the city from the 17th to 19th centuries.

"Just as Dr. Ulrich's research brings to light 'the silent work of ordinary people,' this extraordinary project has given our community the chance to recognize the silent and forgotten, the people who, though enslaved, helped build Portsmouth in those early days of our history," committee Chairwoman Vernis Jackson said. "We are delighted to have Dr. Ulrich as honorary co-chair, to remind us of all those who helped shape who and where we are today."

The committee is in the final phase of fund-raising for the roughly \$1.2 million project. Work could begin as early as this summer.

For information and secure online donations, visit www.africanburyinggroundnh.org.