

City honors slave forebears with dignity

Many Portsmouth residents may relate to recent Portsmouth High School graduate Valeria Agudelo. Proud of her tolerant and progressive city, she said she was unaware of its slave past. “There were slaves in the South, of course. But it was a shock to think those things happened here,” she said.

Indeed they did, but this tolerant city just this week took a significant step forward to not only recognize that past, but to honor those unnamed Africans who came here as slaves. Piscataqua Landscaping in Eliot, Maine, has been selected as the contractor to build the African Burying Ground Memorial Park on Chestnut Street. The hope is that work on a \$1.2 million project can be completed by November; but even if it takes longer, the fact remains that city residents can now be assured that the park will honor with dignity the more than 200 Africans buried underneath Portsmouth.

The city has graciously lent the African Burying Ground Memorial Committee the last \$165,000 to complete the park, after it raised more than \$1 million in private funds. But it is only a loan, and the committee still has to secure this last little bit of needed funding. The Portsmouth High School Black Student Union gave the committee its first boost. Black Student Union President Agudelo this week presented committee Chairwoman Vernis Jackson with a check for \$970, money the student group has raised since 2013. We would encourage those unfamiliar with Portsmouth’s slave past to learn more, and to consider making a contribution to this worthy project.