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IN HONOR OF THOSE FORGOTTEN

The Portsmouth, New Hampshire African Burying Ground

CHESTNUT STREET, home to the recently rediscovered site in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, has national significance. It is the only archaeologically authenticated 18th century African burying ground in all of New England.

The depiction of these burials is an artist's approximation based on archeological evidence.

ON OCTOBER 7, 2003, Portsmouth made a startling discovery. Beneath Chestnut Street, on the spot old maps had marked as a "Negro Burying Ground," city contractors unearthed the crumbling remains of wooden coffins.

Under the direction of the State Archaeologist, some of the remains were removed for examination. A hearse and members of local church communities observed the exhumation with due respect. Five burial sites were not further disturbed. Subsequent DNA testing of human remains from eight individuals identified their African descent and these remains await re-interment. Early maps suggest that there may be as many as 200 graves in the vicinity.

This careful treatment of the site and the painstaking laboratory analysis make this the only archaeologically verified African Burying Ground of its era in all of New England. Only one other site — the African Burial Ground in Manhattan — is of comparable age and historical importance.

Across America, sites that illustrate the passage of Africans into the life of the nation have added to the rich culture of modern American life. Archaeological examination and historical research more fully define our understanding of sites such as Jamestown, Virginia and the African Meeting House in Boston.

Portsmouth has more than 400 years of history to add to the national interpretation of our past.

In 2004, the City Council created the African Burying Ground Committee, appointing members from the local African-American community including representatives from the Seacoast African American Cultural Center and the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail Inc., as well as members of the City Council and the community at large to determine how to interpret the African Burying Ground chapter of that history.

How could Portsmouth's African Burying Ground have been forgotten?

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE INDICATES that the African Burying Ground was in use as early as 1705. The area that is now Chestnut Street was an undeveloped parcel on the outskirts of town.



A "Negro Burying Ground" was included in this 1859 plan.

In 1760, Portsmouth Town Records refer to it as "the Negro Burying Yard"; an 1859 plan of Glebe land (parcels set aside for the ministry) identifies the site as a Negro Burying Ground. But over time, as Portsmouth grew, the African Burying Ground was paved over, built over and overlooked.

While it isn't possible to determine how many of those buried beneath Chestnut Street were enslaved and how many were free, we do know something about Africans living in Portsmouth around 1705. The first black person recorded in Portsmouth history arrived in 1645. In 1708, New Hampshire's Governor Dudley reported there were 70 enslaved Africans in the colony. A few black people in colonial Portsmouth were free. Most were not. They included skilled craftsmen such as cooper Nero Wheelwright and potters Adam and Mercer Marshall. Primus Fowle was a familiar presence in the



AFRICAN HISTORY IN AMERICA



New Hampshire Gazette printing office where he labored as a pressman.

In 1779, a group of twenty enslaved Africans living in Portsmouth households signed a petition to the NH Council and House of Representatives asking for their freedom. Among the petitioners was Prince Whipple, owned by William Whipple, signer of the Declaration of Independence. Their signatures are known. The grandparents and forebears of these known individuals, some free and some enslaved, are the nameless and forgotten buried under Chestnut Street.

It is time to remember the men and women who built Portsmouth and the hardships they bore in free, indentured or enslaved labor. This burying ground was a segregated space and the identified remains contain African DNA; its story is a verified and tangible piece of Portsmouth's early 18th century history.

An excerpt from the 1779 petition for freedom, signed by 20 enslaved Africans living in Portsmouth.



THE AFRICAN BURYING GROUND site is located in the heart of historic Portsmouth, on a street lined with homes and businesses.

AFRICAN BURYING GROUND

Celebrating our shared history

AS THE AFRICAN BURYING GROUND COMMITTEE DISCUSSED the importance of this site, they recognized that this is not a question of black history or white history; this is Portsmouth's history.

But there were practical obstacles to overcome. The Burying Ground lies beneath a public street in the heart of Portsmouth's historic downtown, lined with homes and businesses. The Committee has gained the support of the Chestnut Street abutters and the Mayor and City Council to close the block to through traffic to create the public memorial while maintaining access to the properties.

In addition, the site presents complicated, almost unique physical challenges because the remains were discovered at very shallow depths, requiring adjustments to the landscaping, lighting and paving plans. The question of how best to honor those buried here also raises challenging questions. The Committee has answered by listening: to the abutters, the State Archaeologist and consulting archaeologist, the design team, the Mayor and City Council and to the community, and by following their lead, imagination, and unanimous desire to do the right thing.

The Chestnut Street site where this history was revealed should be restored to dignity. That is what the African Burying Ground Memorial is designed to do — give our community the opportunity "To stand in honor of those forgotten."









HISTORY OF THE AFRICAN BURYING GROUND MEMORIAL

OCT 2003 13 graves discovered under Chestnut Street

AUG 2004 Portsmouth Mayor appoints African Burying Ground Committee

APR 2005 City Council votes to accept the Committee's street closure recommendation

APR 2007

City contracts with Woodburn & Company Landscape Architecture to design memorial park

APR - MAY 2007

Committee holds two public forums soliciting input on memorial design

SEP 2007 – JUN 2008 City conducts national search for memorial artist/sculptor; selects Jerome Meadows of Meadowlark Studios

JUL - OCT 2008

Committee holds meetings with designers and City staff

OCT 2008 Committee presents final design concept to City Council; receives approval

NOV 2008

Archaeological tests uncover additional burials, requiring park redesign

JAN - NOV 2009

Park redesign completed; planning for community fundraising campaign

DEC 2009 – PRESENT Honorary campaign chairs identified; grants and other fundraising efforts ongoing

DEC 2010 City Council votes unanimously to appropriate \$100,000 in project funding

Pictured at left, top to bottom: The site at Chesnut Street; Landscape architect Roberta Woodburn and artist/sculptor Jerome Meadows; The Committee and design team visualize the memorial site; Members of the public participate in a design forum.



We Stand in Honor of Those Forgotten

IN 2007, THE COMMITTEE HOSTED public forums where more than 100 citizens met to discuss how the Burying Ground should be restored to the same respectfulness as other City cemeteries.

The Committee's proposal based on those discussions, endorsed by the City Council, is to construct the African Burying Ground Memorial Park. This public space identified with iconic art that defines it as a sacred place with West African cultural roots, has been further dignified with a title, "We Stand in Honor of Those Forgotten."

In a direct line between the Seacoast African American Cultural Center on Middle Street and key points on the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail that has long acknowledged this site, the 6,500-square foot Park extends the length of Chestnut Street between Court Street and State Street. The Memorial includes sculptural pieces, historical information, granite seating walls, a community plaza, a fence inlaid with art tiles designed by Portsmouth schoolchildren, landscaping and pedestrian-scale lighting.

Designed by sculptor and artist Jerome Meadows and local landscape architect Roberta Woodburn, the intent of the African Burying Ground Memorial Park is to connect the people of Portsmouth today with those buried here long ago. A sculpture of two life-sized figures — one male and one female — with each figure reaching around the edge of the slab towards the other, speaks to



the various levels of separation, uncertainty, difficulty and perseverance experienced by those individuals brought to this country as captives. At the opposite end of the site is a series of stylized figures who represent the collective community of Portsmouth coming together to acknowledge, protect and pay homage to this Burying Ground and partly encircle the burial vault containing the re-interred remains. The burial vault will be marked with a Sankofa, a West African Adinkra symbol which means *"Return and Get It — Learn from the Past."*

The park is a memorial, as well as a permanent resting place for those buried beneath, marked with the same appropriate scale and solemnity as other city cemeteries. It is a public place of respect and perpetual care. At public forums Portsmouth citizens agreed the memorial should suggest the stories of the people buried there, bringing their memory out of darkness in a peaceful park that invites thoughtful reflection.









Your help makes this Memorial possible



ORIGINAL WORKS OF OUTDOOR PUBLIC ART and related street improvements will restore this site as sacred ground and encourage reverence, reflection and learning so that those buried beneath are never again forgotten.

The cost for this memorial is \$1.2 million. This funds the artist's sculptural pieces, re-interment of the human remains in a burial vault, granite seating walls and decorative masonry elements, a community plaza, historical interpretive elements, and related landscaping and pedestrian scale lighting. Much of the project cost is related to street improvements including sidewalks, paving, curbing and drainage improvements.

The Portsmouth City Council has appropriated \$100,000 for this project and additional governmental grants and other funding is being sought from a variety of sources. Individual citizens and organizations have begun to make donations.

But much remains to be done and your financial support is needed. Leading members of our community, Portsmouth schoolchildren and various non-profit partners such as the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail, Inc., the Seacoast African American Cultural Center, the Portsmouth Historical Society and Art-Speak (the City of Portsmouth Cultural Commission), have joined in this effort. The African Burying Ground needs you to stand in honor of those forgotten.

PORTSMOUTH AFRICAN BURYING GROUND MEMORIAL PARK

HONORARY CO-CHAIRS

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Ph.D., Harvard University Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Ph.D., Harvard University

MEMBERS OF THE MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE AFRICAN BURYING GROUND

Vernis Jackson, Chair Mary Bailey, Vice Chair Valerie Cunningham Councilor M. Christine Dwyer Kelvin Edwards Steve Parkinson, Public Works Director, Ex-Officio

Suzanne Woodland, Assistant City Attorney, Ex-Officio

DESIGN TEAM

Jerome Meadows, Meadowlark Studios Roberta Woodburn, Woodburn & Company Landscape Architecture

COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS

Sue Cobler, Art-Speak Morey Goodman Reverend Arthur L. Hilson Jane James Janet Prince Stephanie Seacord Nike Speltz Peter Weeks

THE PORTSMOUTH AFRICAN BURYING GROUND IS A COLLABORATION BETWEEN

City of Portsmouth Art-Speak, City of Portsmouth Cultural Commission Seacoast African American Cultural Center Portsmouth Historical Society and the Discover Portsmouth Center Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail, Inc.

PORTSMOUTH AFRICAN BURYING GROUND TRUST FUND

The Portsmouth City Council established the African Burying Ground Trust Fund to serve as a repository for funds contributed for the construction and maintenance of the African Burying Ground Memorial Park. Contributions to the Trust Fund are tax deductible, in accordance with Internal Revenue Service regulations. For information about how to support the creation of the Memorial, please contact a Committee Volunteer or write to info@AfricanBuryingGroundNH.org.

Portsmouth African Burying Ground Trust Fund

1 Junkins Avenue, Portsmouth, New Hampshire 03801 info@AfricanBuryingGroundNH.org www.AfricanBuryingGroundNH.org

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PHOTOGRAPHY: Cover map – courtesy of the Portsmouth Atheneum; Inside cover – photo by Crystal Paradis, Brown & Company; Page 2 – 1859 Plan as shown in Rambles About Portsmouth. First Series. Reprint of 1859 edition. Lewis W. Brewster, Portsmouth, NH; Page 3 – Painting by Joseph DesBarres, A View of Portsmouth NH Taken from the East Shore 1776, Maritime Portsmouth, courtesy of Portsmouth Marine Society, 2011. Scan of 1779 Petition courtesy of New Hampshire Historical Society; Page 5 – All photos courtesy City of Portsmouth; Page 6 – Artist renderings by Roberta Woodburn, Woodburn & Company Landscape Architecture; Page 7 – Photos of Artist Renderings courtesy of Artist and Sculptor Jerome Meadows, Meadowlark Studios. I stand for the Ancestors Here and Beyond I stand for those who feel anger I stand for those who were treated unjustly I stand for those who were taken from their loved ones I stand for those who suffered the middle passage I stand for those who survived upon these shores I stand for those who pay homage to this ground I stand for those who find dignity in these bones

-JEROME MEADOWS, ARTIST AND SCULPTOR



Sankofa, a West African Adinkra symbol "Return and Get it — Learn from the Past"

www.AfricanBuryingGroundNH.org